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LAUNCH OF A CHINA SHIP AT A NEW ENGLAND  
PORT, 1790-1800

From the painting by C. W. Jefferys

# FRIGATE AND CLIPPER

PART 1: THE FIGHT FOR A FREE SEA  
BY RALPH D. PAINE

PART 2: THE OLD MERCHANT MARINE  
BY RALPH D. PAINE



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PART I  
THE FIGHT FOR A FREE SEA  
A CHRONICLE  
OF THE WAR OF 1812  
BY  
RALPH D. PAINE

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# THE FIGHT FOR A FREE SEA

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## CHAPTER I

“ON TO CANADA!”

THE American people of today, weighed in the balances of the greatest armed conflict of all time and found not wanting, can afford to survey, in a spirit of candid scrutiny and without reviving an ancient grudge, that turbulent episode in the welding of their nation which is called the War of 1812. In spite of defeats and disappointments this war was, in the large, enduring sense, a victory. It was in this renewed defiance of England that the dream of the founders of the Republic and the ideals of the embattled farmers of Bunker Hill and Saratoga achieved their goal. Henceforth the world was to respect these States, not as so many colonies bitterly wrangling among themselves, but as a sovereign and independent nation.

The War of 1812, like the American Revolution, was a valiant contest for survival on the part of the spirit of freedom. It was essentially akin to the world-wide struggle of a century later, when sons of the old foemen of 1812 — sons of the painted Indians and of the Kentucky pioneers in fringed buckskins, sons of the New Hampshire ploughboys clad in homespun, sons of the Canadian militia and the red-coated regulars of the British line, sons of the tarry seamen of the *Constitution* and the *Guerrière* — stood side by side as brothers in arms to save from brutal obliteration the same spirit of freedom. And so it is that in Flanders fields today the poppies blow above the graves of the sons of the men who fought each other a century ago in the Michigan wilderness and at Lundy's Lane.

The causes and the background of the War of 1812 are presented elsewhere in this series of Chronicles.<sup>1</sup> Great Britain, at death grips with Napoleon, paid small heed to the rights and dignities of neutral nations. The harsh and selfish maritime policy of the age, expressed in the British Navigation Acts and intensified by the struggle with Napoleon, led the Mistress of the Seas to perpetrate

<sup>1</sup> See *Jefferson and His Colleagues*, by Allen Johnson (in *The Chronicles of America*).



indignity after indignity on the ships and sailors which were carrying American commerce around the world. The United States demanded a free sea, which Great Britain would not grant. Of necessity, then, such futile weapons as embargoes and non-intercourse acts had to give place to the musket, the bayonet, and the carronade. There could be no compromise between the clash of doctrines. It was for the United States to assert herself, regardless of the odds, or sink into a position of supine dependency upon the will of Great Britain and the wooden walls of her invincible navy.

“Free Trade and Sailors’ Rights!” was the American war cry. It expressed the two grievances which outweighed all others — the interference with American shipping and the ruthless impressment of seamen from beneath the Stars and Stripes. No less high-handed than Great Britain’s were Napoleon’s offenses against American commerce, and there was just cause for war with France. Yet Americans felt the greater enmity toward England, partly as an inheritance from the Revolution, but chiefly because of the greater injury which England had wrought, owing to her superior strength on the sea.

There were, to be sure, other motives in the conflict. It is not to be supposed that the frontiersmen

of the Northwest and Southwest, who hailed the war with enthusiasm, were ardently aroused to redress wrongs inflicted upon their seafaring countrymen. Their enmity towards Great Britain was compounded of quite different grievances. Behind the recent Indian wars on the frontier they saw, or thought they saw, British paymasters. The red trappers and hunters of the forest were bloodily defending their lands; and there was a long-standing bond of interest between them and the British in Canada. The British were known to the tribes generally as fur traders, not "land stealers"; and the great traffic carried on by the merchants of Montreal, not only in the Canadian wilderness but also in the American Northwest, naturally drew Canadians and Indians into the same camp. "On to Canada!" was the slogan of the frontiersmen. It expressed at once their desire to punish the hereditary foe and to rid themselves of an unfriendly power to the north.

The United States was poorly prepared and equipped for military and naval campaigns when, in June, 1812, Congress declared war on Great Britain. Nothing had been learned from the costly blunders of the Revolution, and the delusion that readiness for war was a menace to democracy had influenced

the Government to absurd extremes. The regular army comprised only sixty-seven hundred men, scattered over an enormous country and on garrison service from which they could not be safely withdrawn. They were without traditions and without experience in actual warfare. Winfield Scott, at that time a young officer in the regular army, wrote:

The old officers had very generally sunk into either sloth, ignorance, or habits of intemperate drinking. . . . Many of the appointments were positively bad, and a majority of the remainder indifferent. Party spirit of that day knew no bounds, and was of course blind to policy. Federalists were almost entirely excluded from selection, though great numbers were eager for the field. . . . Where there was no lack of educated men in the dominant party, the appointments consisted generally of swaggerers, dependents, decayed gentlemen, and others “fit for nothing else,” which always turned out utterly unfit for any military purpose whatever.

The main reliance was to be on militia and volunteers, an army of the free people rushing to arms in defense of their liberties, as voiced by Jefferson and echoed more than a century later by another spokesman of democracy. There was the stuff for splendid soldiers in these farmers and woodsmen, but in many lamentable instances their regiments were

no more than irresponsible armed mobs. Until as recently as the War with Spain, the perilous fallacy persisted that the States should retain control of their several militia forces in time of war and deny final authority to the Federal Government. It was this doctrine which so nearly wrecked the cause of the Revolution. George Washington had learned the lesson through painful experience, but his counsel was wholly disregarded; and, because it serves as a text and an interpretation for much of the humiliating history which we are about to follow, that counsel is here quoted in part. Washington wrote in retrospect:

Had we formed a permanent army in the beginning, which by the continuance of the same men in service had been capable of discipline, we never should have had to retreat with a handful of men across the Delaware in 1776, trembling for the fate of America, which nothing but the infatuation of the enemy could have saved; we should not have remained all the succeeding winter at their mercy, with sometimes scarcely a sufficient body of men to mount the ordinary guards, liable at every moment to be dissipated if they had only thought proper to march against us; we should not have been under the necessity of fighting Brandywine with an unequal number of raw troops, and afterwards of seeing Philadelphia fall a prey to a victorious army; we should not have been at Valley Forge with

less than half the force of the enemy, destitute of everything, in a situation neither to resist or to retire; we should not have seen New York left with a handful of men, yet an overmatch for the main army of these States, while the principal part of their force was detached for the reduction of two of them; we should not have found ourselves this spring so weak as to be insulted by 5000 men, unable to protect our baggage and magazines, their security depending on a good countenance and a want of enterprise in the enemy; we should not have been, the greatest part of the war, inferior to the enemy, indebted for our safety to their inactivity, enduring frequently the mortification of seeing inviting opportunities to ruin them pass unimproved for want of a force which the country was completely able to afford, and of seeing the country ravaged, our towns burnt, the inhabitants plundered, abused, murdered, with impunity from the same cause.

The War of 1812, besides being hampered by short enlistments, confused authority, and incompetent officers, was fought by a country and an army divided against itself. When Congress authorized the enrollment of one hundred thousand militia, the governors of Massachusetts and Connecticut refused to furnish their quotas, objecting to the command of United States officers and to the sending of men beyond the borders of their own States. This attitude fairly indicated the feeling of New England, which was opposed to the war and



openly spoke of secession. Moreover, the wealthy merchants and bankers of New England declined to subscribe to the national loans when the Treasury at Washington was bankrupt, and vast quantities of supplies were shipped from New England seaports to the enemy in Canada. It was an extraordinary paradox that those States which had seen their sailors impressed by thousands and which had suffered most heavily from England's attacks on neutral commerce should have arrayed themselves in bitter opposition to the cause and the Government. It was "Mr. Madison's War," they said, and he could win or lose it — and pay the bills, for that matter.

The American navy was in little better plight than the army. England flew the royal ensign over six hundred ships of war and was the undisputed sovereign of the seas. Opposed to this mighty armada were five frigates, three ships, and seven brigs, which Monroe recommended should be "kept in a body in a safe port." Not worth mention were the two hundred ridiculous little gunboats which had to stow the one cannon below to prevent capsizing when they ventured out of harbor. These craft were a pet notion of Jefferson. "Believing, myself," he said of them, "that gunboats are the

only water defense which can be useful to us and protect us from the ruinous folly of a navy, I am pleased with everything which promises to improve them.”

A nation of eight million people, unready, blundering, rent by internal dissension, had resolved to challenge an England hardened by war and tremendously superior in military resources. It was not all madness, however, for the vast empire of Canada lay exposed to invasion, and in this quarter the enemy was singularly vulnerable. Henry Clay spoke for most of his countrymen beyond the boundaries of New England when he announced to Congress: “The conquest of Canada is in your power. I trust that I shall not be deemed presumptuous when I state that I verily believe that the militia of Kentucky are alone competent to place Montreal and Upper Canada at your feet. Is it nothing to the British nation; is it nothing to the pride of her monarch to have the last immense North American possession held by him in the commencement of his reign wrested from his dominions?” Even Jefferson was deluded into predicting that the capture of Canada as far as Quebec would be a mere matter of marching through the country and would give the troops experience for

the attack on Halifax and the final expulsion of England from the American continent.

The British Provinces, extending twelve hundred miles westward to Lake Superior, had a population of less than five hundred thousand; but a third of these were English immigrants or American Loyalists and their descendants, types of folk who would hardly sit idly and await invasion. That they should resist or strike back seems not to have been expected in the war councils of the amiable Mr. Madison. Nor were other and manifold dangers taken into account by those who counseled war. The Great Lakes were defenseless, the warlike Indians of the Northwest were in arms and awaiting the British summons, while the whole country beyond the Wabash and the Maumee was almost unguarded. Isolated here and there were stockades containing a few dozen men beyond hope of rescue, frontier posts of what is now the Middle West. Plans of campaign were prepared without thought of the insuperable difficulties of transport through regions in which there were neither roads, provisions, towns, nor navigable rivers. Armies were maneuvered and victories won upon the maps in the office of the Secretary of War. Generals were selected by some inscrutable process which decreed

that dull-witted, pompous incapables should bungle campaigns and waste lives.

It was wisely agreed that of all the strategic points along this far-flung and thinly held frontier, Detroit should receive the earliest attention. At all costs this point was to be safeguarded as a base for the advance into Canada from the west. A remote trading post within gunshot of the enemy across the river and menaced by tribes of hostile Indians, Detroit then numbered eight hundred inhabitants and was protected only by a stout enclosure of logs. For two hundred miles to the nearest friendly settlements in Ohio, the line of communications was a forest trail which skirted Lake Erie for some distance and could easily be cut by the enemy. From Detroit it was the intention of the Americans to strike the first blow at the Canadian post of Amherstburg near by.

The stage was now set for the entrance of General William Hull as one of the luckless, unheroic figures upon whom the presidential power of appointment bestowed the trappings of high military command. He was by no means the worst of these. In fact, the choice seemed auspicious. Hull had seen honorable service in the Revolution and had won the esteem of George Washington.

He was now Governor of Michigan Territory. At sixty years of age he had no desire to gird on the sword. He was persuaded by Madison, however, to accept a brigadier general's commission and to lead the force ordered to Detroit. His instructions were vague, but in June, 1812, shortly before the declaration of war, he took command of two thousand regulars and militia at Dayton, Ohio, and began the arduous advance through the wilderness towards Detroit. The adventure was launched with energy. These hardy, reliant men knew how to cut roads, to bridge streams, and to exist on scanty rations. Until sickness began to decimate their ranks, they advanced at an encouraging rate and were almost halfway to Detroit when the tidings of the outbreak of hostilities overtook them.

General Hull forthwith hurried his troops to the Maumee River, leaving their camp equipment and heavy stores behind. He now committed his first crass blunder. Though the British controlled the waters of Lake Erie, yet he sent a schooner ahead with all his hospital supplies, intrenching tools, official papers, and muster rolls. The little vessel was captured within sight of Detroit and the documents proved invaluable to the British commander of Upper Canada, Major General Isaac Brock, who



gained thereby a complete idea of the American plans and proceeded to act accordingly. Brock was a soldier of uncommon intelligence and resolution, acquitting himself with distinction, and contrasting with his American adversaries in a manner rather painful to contemplate.

At length Hull reached Detroit and crossed the river to assume the offensive. He was strongly hopeful of success. The Canadians appeared friendly and several hundred sought his protection. Even the enemy's militia were deserting to his colors. In a proclamation Hull looked forward to a bloodless conquest, informing the Canadians that they were to be emancipated from tyranny and oppression and restored to the dignified station of freemen. “I have a force which will break down all opposition,” said he, “and that force is but the vanguard of a much greater.”

He soundly reasoned that unless a movement could be launched against Niagara, at the other end of Lake Erie, the whole strength of the British might be thrown against him and that he was likely to be trapped in Detroit. There was a general plan of campaign, submitted by Major General Henry Dearborn before the war began, which provided for a threefold invasion — from Sackett's Harbor on

Lake Ontario, from Niagara, and from Detroit — in support of a grand attack along the route leading past Lake Champlain to Montreal. Theoretically, it was good enough strategy, but no attempt had been made to prepare the execution, and there was no leader competent to direct it.

In response to Hull's urgent appeal, Dearborn, who was puttering about between Boston and Albany, confessed that he knew nothing about what was going on at Niagara. He ranked as the commander-in-chief of the American forces and he awoke from his habitual stupor to ask himself this amazing question: "Who is to have the command of the operations in Upper Canada? I take it for granted that my command does not extend to that distant quarter." If Dearborn did not know who was in control of the operations at Niagara, it was safe to say that nobody else did, and Hull was left to deal with the increasing forces in front of him and the hordes of Indians in the rear, to garrison Detroit, to assault the fort at Amherstburg, to overcome the British naval forces on Lake Erie — and all without the slightest help or coöperation from his Government.

Meanwhile Brock had ascertained that the American force at Niagara consisted of a few

hundred militia with no responsible officer in command, who were making a pretense of patrolling thirty-six miles of frontier. They were undisciplined, ragged, without tents, shoes, money, or munitions, and ready to fall back if attacked or to go home unless soon relieved. Having nothing to fear in that quarter, Brock gathered up a small body of regulars as he marched and proceeded to Amherstburg to finish the business of the unfortunate Hull.

That Hull deserves some pity as well as the disgrace which overwhelmed him is quite apparent. Most of his troops were ill-equipped, unreliable, and insubordinate. Even during the march to Detroit he had to use a regular regiment to compel the obedience of twelve hundred mutinous militiamen who refused to advance. Their own officer could do nothing with them. At Detroit two hundred of them refused to cross the river, on the ground that they were not obliged to serve outside the United States. Granted such extenuation as this, however, Hull showed himself so weak and contemptible in the face of danger that he could not expect his fighting men to maintain any respect for him.

His fatal flaw was lack of courage and promptitude. He did not know how to play a poor hand

well. In the emergency which confronted him he was like a dull sword in a rusty scabbard. While the enemy waited for reinforcements, he might have captured Amherstburg. He had the superior force, and yet he delayed and lost heart while his regiments dwindled because of sickness and desertion and jeered at his leadership. The watchful Indians, led by the renowned Tecumseh, learned to despise the Americans instead of fearing them, and were eager to take the warpath against so easy a prey. Already other bands of braves were hastening from Lake Huron and from Mackinac, whose American garrison had been wiped out.

Brooding and shaken, like an old man utterly undone, Hull abandoned his pretentious invasion of Canada and retreated across the river to shelter his troops behind the log barricades of Detroit. He sent six hundred men to try to open a line to Ohio, but, after a sharp encounter with a British force, Hull was obliged to admit that they "could only open communication as far as the points of their bayonets extended." His only thought was to extricate himself, not to stand and fight a winning battle without counting the cost. His officers felt only contempt for his cowardice. They were convinced that the tide could be turned in their favor.

There were steadfast men in the ranks who were eager to take the measure of the redcoats. The colonels were in open mutiny and, determined to set General Hull aside, they offered the command to Colonel Miller of the regulars, who declined to accept it. When Hull proposed a general retreat, he was informed that every man of the Ohio militia would refuse to obey the order. These troops who had been so fickle and jealous of their rights were unwilling to share the leader's disgrace.

Two days after his arrival at Amherstburg, General Brock sent to the Americans a summons to surrender, adding with a crafty discernment of the effect of the threat upon the mind of the man with whom he was dealing: “You must be aware that the numerous body of Indians who have attached themselves to my troops will be beyond my control the moment the contest commences.” Hull could see only the horrid picture of a massacre of the women and children within the stockades of Detroit. He failed to realize that his thousand effective infantrymen could hold out for weeks behind those log ramparts against Brock's few hundred regulars and volunteers. Two and a half years later, Andrew Jackson and his militia emblazoned a very different story behind the cypress

breastworks of New Orleans. Besides the thousand men in the fort, Hull had detached five hundred under Colonels McArthur and Cass to attempt to break through the Indian cordon in his rear and obtain supplies. These he now vainly endeavored to recall while he delayed a final reply to Brock's mandate.

Indecision had doomed the garrison which was now besieged. Tecumseh's warriors had crossed the river and were between the fort and McArthur's column. Brock boldly decided to assault, a desperate venture, but he must have known that Hull's will had crumbled. No more than seven hundred strong, the little British force crossed the river just before daybreak on the 16th of August and was permitted to select its positions without the slightest molestation. A few small field pieces, posted on the Canadian side of the river, hurled shot into the fort, killing four of Hull's men, and two British armed schooners lay within range.

Brock advanced, expecting to suffer large losses from the heavy guns which were posted to cover the main approach to the fort, but his men passed through the zone of danger and found cover in which they made ready to storm the defenses of Detroit. As Brock himself walked forward to take



note of the situation before giving the final commands, a white flag fluttered from the battery in front of him. Without firing a shot, Hull had surrendered Detroit and with it the great territory of Michigan, the most grievous loss of domain that the United States has ever suffered in war or peace. On the same day Fort Dearborn (Chicago), which had been forgotten by the Government, was burned by Indians after all its defenders had been slain. These two disasters with the earlier fall of Mackinac practically erased American dominion from the western empire of the Great Lakes. Visions of the conquest of Canada were thus rudely dimmed in the opening actions of the war.

General Hull was tried by court-martial on charges of treason, cowardice, and neglect of duty. He was convicted on the last two charges and sentenced to be shot, with a recommendation to the mercy of the President. The verdict was approved by Madison, but he remitted the execution of the sentence because of the old man's services in the Revolution. Guilty though he was, an angry and humiliated people also made him the scapegoat for the sins of neglect and omission of which their Government stood convicted. In the testimony offered at his trial there was a touch, rude, vivid, and very

human, to portray him in the final hours of the tragic episode at Detroit. Spurned by his officers, he sat on the ground with his back against the rampart while "he apparently unconsciously filled his mouth with tobacco, putting in quid after quid more than he generally did; the spittle colored with tobacco juice ran from his mouth on his neckcloth, beard, cravat, and vest."

Later events in the Northwest Territory showed that the British successes in that region were gained chiefly because of an unworthy alliance with the Indian tribes, whose barbarous methods of warfare stained the records of those who employed them. "Not more than seven or eight hundred British soldiers ever crossed the Detroit River," says Henry Adams, "but the United States raised fully twenty thousand men and spent at least five million dollars and many lives in expelling them. The Indians alone made this outlay necessary. The campaign of Tippecanoe, the surrender of Detroit and Mackinaw, the massacres at Fort Dearborn, the river Raisin, and Fort Meigs, the murders along the frontier, and the campaign of 1813 were the prices paid for the Indian lands in the Wabash Valley."

Before the story shifts to the other fields of the

war, it seems logical to follow to its finally successful result the bloody, wasteful struggle for the recovery of the lost territory. This operation required large armies and long campaigns, together with the naval supremacy of Lake Erie, won in the next year by Oliver Hazard Perry, before the fugitive British forces fell back from the charred ruins of Detroit and Amherstburg and were soundly beaten at the battle of the Thames — the one decisive, clean-cut American victory of the war on the Canadian frontier. These events showed that far too much had been expected of General William Hull, who comprehended his difficulties but made no attempt to batter a way through them, forgetting that to die and win is always better than to live and fail.

## CHAPTER II

### LOST GROUND REGAINED

GENERAL WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON, the hero of Tippecanoe and the Governor of Indiana Territory, whose capital was at Vincennes on the Wabash, possessed the experience and the instincts of a soldier. He had foreseen that Hull, unless he received support, must either abandon Detroit or be hopelessly hemmed in. The task of defending the western border was ardently undertaken by the States of Kentucky and Ohio. They believed in the war and were ready to aid it with the men and resources of a vigorous population of almost a million. When the word came that Hull was in desperate straits, Harrison hastened to organize a relief expedition. Before he could move, Detroit had fallen. But a high tide of enthusiasm swept him on toward an attempt to recover the lost empire. The Federal Government approved his plans and commissioned him

as commander of the Northwestern army of ten thousand men.

In the early autumn of 1812, General Harrison launched his ambitious and imposing campaign, by which three separate bodies of troops were to advance and converge within striking distance of Detroit, while a fourth was to invade and destroy the nests of Indians on the Wabash and Illinois rivers. An active British force might have attacked and defeated these isolated columns one by one, for they were beyond supporting distance of each other; but Brock now needed his regulars for the defense of the Niagara frontier. The scattered American army, including brigades from Virginia and Pennsylvania, was too strong to be checked by Indian forays, but it had not reckoned with the obstacles of an unfriendly wilderness and climate. In October, no more than a month after the bugles had sounded the advance, the campaign was halted, demoralized and darkly uncertain. A vast swamp stretched as a barrier across the route and heavy rains made it impassable.

Hull had crossed the same swamp with his small force in the favorable summer season, but Harrison was unable to transport the food and war material needed by his ten thousand men. A million



rations were required at the goal of the Maumee Rapids, and yet after two months of heartbreaking endeavor not a pound of provisions had been carried within fifty miles of this place. Wagons and pack-trains floundered in the mud and were abandoned. The rivers froze and thwarted the use of flotillas of scows. Winter closed down, and the American army was forlornly mired and blockaded along two hundred miles of front. The troops at Fort Defiance ate roots and bark. Typhus broke out among them, and they died like flies. For the failure to supply the army, the War Department was largely responsible, and Secretary Eustis very properly resigned in December. This removed one glaring incompetent from the list but it failed to improve Harrison's situation.

It was not until the severe frosts of January, 1813, fettered the swamps that Harrison was able to extricate his troops and forward supplies to the shore of Lake Erie for an offensive against Amherstburg. First in motion was the left wing of thirteen hundred Kentucky militia and regulars under General Winchester. This officer was an elderly planter who, like Hull, had worn a uniform in the Revolution. He had no great aptitude for war and was held in low esteem by the Kentuckians

of his command — hungry, mutinous, and disgusted men, who were counting the days before their enlistments should expire. The commonplace Winchester was no leader to hold them in hand and spur their jaded determination.

While they were building storehouses and log defenses, within dangerously easy distance of the British post at Amherstburg, the tempting message came that the settlement of Frenchtown, on the Raisin, thirty miles away and within the British lines, was held by only two companies of Canadian militia. Here was an opportunity for a dashing adventure, and Winchester ordered half his total force to march and destroy this detachment of the enemy. The troops accordingly set out, drove home a brisk assault, cleared Frenchtown of its defenders, and held their ground awaiting orders.

Winchester then realized that he had leaped before he looked. He had seriously weakened his own force while the column at Frenchtown was in peril from two thousand hostile troops and Indians only eighteen miles beyond the river Raisin. The Kentuckians left with him decided matters for themselves. They insisted on marching to the support of their comrades at Frenchtown. Meanwhile General Harrison had learned of this fatuous

division of strength and was hastening to the base at the falls of the Maumee. There he found only three hundred men. All the others had gone with Winchester to reinforce the men at Frenchtown. It was too late to summon troops from other points, and Harrison waited with forebodings of disaster.

News reached him after two days. The Americans at the Raisin had suffered not only a defeat but a massacre. Nearly four hundred were killed in battle or in flight. Those who survived were prisoners. No more than thirty had escaped of a force one thousand strong. The enemy had won this extraordinary success with five hundred white troops and about the same number of Indians, led by Colonel Procter, whom Brock had placed in command of the fort at Amherstburg. Procter's name is infamous in the annals of the war. The worst traditions of Indian atrocity, uncontrolled and even encouraged, cluster about his memory. He was later promoted in rank instead of being degraded, a costly blunder which England came to regret and at last redeemed. A notoriously incompetent officer, on this one occasion of the battle of the Raisin he acted with decision and took advantage of the American blunder.

The conduct of General Winchester after his

arrival at Frenchtown is inexplicable. He did nothing to prepare his force for action even on learning that the British were advancing from Amherstburg. A report of the disaster, after recording that no patrols or pickets were ordered out during the night, goes on:

The troops were permitted to select, each for himself, such quarters on the west side of the river as might please him best, whilst the general took his quarters on the east side — not the least regard being paid to defense, order, regularity, or system in the posting of the different corps. . . . Destitute of artillery, or engineers, of men who had ever heard or seen the least of an enemy; and with but a very inadequate supply of ammunition — how he ever could have entertained the most distant hope of success, or what right he had to presume to claim it, is to me one of the strangest things in the world.

At dawn, on the 21st of January, the British and Indians, having crossed the frozen Detroit River the day before, formed within musket shot of the American lines and opened the attack with a battery of three-pounders. They might have rushed the camp with bayonet and tomahawk and killed most of the defenders asleep, but the cannonade alarmed the Kentuckians and they took cover behind a picket fence, using their long rifles so

expertly that they killed or wounded a hundred and eighty-five of the British regulars, who thereupon had to abandon their artillery. Meanwhile, the American regular force, caught on open ground, was flanked and driven toward the river, carrying a militia regiment with it. Panic spread among these unfortunate men and they fled through the deep snow, Winchester among them, while six hundred whooping Indians slew and scalped them without mercy as they ran.

But behind the picket fence the Kentuckians still squinted along the barrels of their rifles and hammered home more bullets and patches. Three hundred and eighty-four of them, they showed a spirit that made their conduct the bright, heroic episode of that black day. Forgotten are their mutinies, their profane disregard of the Articles of War, their jeers at generals and such. They finished in style and covered the multitude of their sins. Unclothed, unfed, uncared for, dirty, and wretched, they proved themselves worthy to be called American soldiers. They fought until there was no more ammunition, until they were surrounded by a thousand of the enemy, and then they honorably surrendered.

The brutal Procter, aware that the Indians would



commit hideous outrages if left unrestrained, nevertheless returned to Amherstburg with his troops and his prisoners, leaving the American wounded to their fate. That night the savages came back to Frenchtown and massacred those hurt and helpless men, thirty in number.

This unhappy incident of the campaign, not so much a battle as a catastrophe, delayed Harrison's operations. His failures had shaken popular confidence, and at the end of this dismal winter, after six months of disappointments in which ten thousand men had accomplished nothing, he was compelled to report to the Secretary of War:

Amongst the reasons which make it necessary to employ a large force, I am sorry to mention the dismay and disinclination to the service which appears to prevail in the western country; numbers must give that confidence which ought to be produced by conscious valor and intrepidity, which never existed in any army in a superior degree than amongst the greater part of the militia which were with me through the winter. The new drafts from this State [Ohio] are entirely of another character and are not to be depended upon. I have no doubt, however, that a sufficient number of good men can be procured, and should they be allowed to serve on horseback, Kentucky would furnish some regiments that would not be inferior to those that fought at the river Raisin; and these were, in my

opinion, superior to any militia that ever took the field in modern times.

There was to be no immediate renewal of action between Procter and Harrison. Each seemed to have conceived so much respect for the forces of the other that they proceeded to increase the distance between them as rapidly as possible. Fearing to be overtaken and greatly outnumbered, the British leader retreated to Canada while the American leader was in a state of mind no less uneasy. Harrison promptly set fire to his storehouses and supplies at the Maumee Rapids, his advanced base near Lake Erie. Thus all this labor and exertion and expense vanished in smoke while, in the sedition of war, he retired some fifteen miles. In such a vast hurry were the adversaries to be quit of each other that a day and a half after the fight at Frenchtown they were sixty miles apart. Harrison remained a fortnight on this back trail and collected two thousand of his troops, with whom he returned to the ruins of his foremost post and undertook the task all over again.

The defensive works which he now built were called Fort Meigs. For the time there was no more talk of invading Canada. The service of the

Kentucky and Ohio militia was expiring, and these seasoned regiments were melting away like snow. Presently Fort Meigs was left with no more than five hundred war-worn men to hold out against British operations afloat and ashore. Luckily Procter had expended his energies at Frenchtown and seemed inclined to repose, for he made no effort to attack the few weak garrisons which guarded the American territory near at hand. From January until April he neglected his opportunities while more American militia marched homeward, while Harrison was absent, while Fort Meigs was unfinished.

At length the British offensive was organized, and a thousand white soldiers and as many Indians, led by Tecumseh, sallied out of Amherstburg with a naval force of two gunboats. Heavy guns were dragged from Detroit to batter down the log walls, for it was the intention to surround and besiege Fort Meigs in the manner taught by the military science of Europe. Meanwhile Harrison had come back from a recruiting mission; and a new brigade of Kentucky militia, twelve hundred strong, under Brigadier General Green Clay, was to follow in boats down the Auglaize and Maumee rivers. Procter's guns were already pounding the walls of

Fort Meigs on the 5th of May when eight hundred troops of this fresh American force arrived within striking distance. They dashed upon the British batteries and took them with the bayonet in a wild, impetuous charge. It was then their business promptly to reform and protect themselves, but through lack of training they failed to obey orders and were off hunting the enemy, every man for himself. In the meantime three companies of British regulars and some volunteers took advantage of the confusion, summoned the Indians, and let loose a vicious counter-attack.

Within sight of General Harrison and the garrison of Fort Meigs, these bold Kentuckians were presently driven from the captured guns, scattered, and shot down or taken prisoner. Only a hundred and seventy of them got away, and they lost even their boats and supplies. The British loss was no more than fifty in killed and wounded. Again Procter inflamed the hatred and contempt of his American foes because forty of his prisoners were tomahawked while guarded by British soldiers. He made no effort to save them and it was the intervention of Tecumseh, the Indian leader, which averted the massacre of the whole body of five hundred prisoners.

Across the river, Colonel John Miller, of the American regular infantry, had attempted a gallant sortie from the fort and had taken a battery but this sally had no great effect on the issue of the engagement. Harrison had lost almost a thousand men, half his fighting force, and was again shut up within the barricades and blockhouses of Fort Meigs. Procter continued the siege only four days longer, for his Indian allies then grew tired of it and faded into the forest. He was not reluctant to accept this excuse for withdrawing. His own militia were drifting away, his regulars were suffering from illness and exposure, and Fort Meigs itself was a harder nut to crack than he had anticipated. Procter therefore withdrew to Amherstburg and made no more trouble until June, when he sent raiding parties into Ohio and created panic among the isolated settlements.

Harrison had become convinced that his campaign must be a defensive one only, until a strong American naval force could be mustered on Lake Erie. He moved his headquarters to Upper Sandusky and Cleveland and concluded to mark time while Perry's fleet was building. The outlook was somber, however, for his thin line of garrisons and his supply bases. They were threatened in all



directions, but he was most concerned for the important depot which he had established at Upper Sandusky, no more than thirty miles from any British landing force which should decide to cross Lake Erie. The place had no fortifications; it was held by a few hundred green recruits; and the only obstacle to a hostile ascent of the Sandusky River was a little stockade near its mouth, called Fort Stephenson.

For the Americans to lose the accumulation of stores and munitions which was almost the only result of a year's campaign would have been a fatal blow. Harrison was greatly disturbed to hear that Tecumseh had gathered his warriors and was following the trail that led to Upper Sandusky and that Procter was moving coastwise with his troops in a flotilla under oars and sail. Harrison was, or believed himself to be, in grave danger of confronting a plight similar to that of William Hull, beset in front, in flank, in rear. His first thought was to evacuate the stockade of Fort Stephenson and to concentrate his force, although this would leave the Sandusky River open for a British advance from the shore of Lake Erie.

An order was sent to young Major Croghan, who held Fort Stephenson with one hundred and sixty

men, to burn the buildings and retreat as fast as possible up the river or along the shore of Lake Erie. This officer, a Kentuckian not yet twenty-one years old, who honored the regiment to which he belonged, deliberately disobeyed his commander. By so doing he sounded a ringing note which was like the call of trumpets amidst the failures, the cloudy uncertainties, the lack of virile leadership, that had strewn the path of the war. In writing he sent this reply back to General William Henry Harrison: "We have determined to maintain this place, and by Heaven, we will."

It was a turning point, in a way, presaging more hopeful events, a warning that youth must be served and that the doddering oldsters were to give place to those who could stand up under the stern and exacting tests of warfare. Such rash ardor was not according to precedent. Harrison promptly relieved the impetuous Croghan of his command and sent a colonel to replace him. But Croghan argued the point so eloquently that the stockade was restored to him next day and he won his chance to do or die. Harrison consolingly informed him that he was to retreat if attacked by British troops "but that to attempt to retire in the face of an Indian force would be vain."

Major Croghan blithely prepared to do anything else than retreat, while General Harrison stayed ten miles away to plan a battle against Tecumseh's Indians if they should happen to come in his direction. On the 1st of August, Croghan's scouts informed him that the woods swarmed with Indians and that British boats were pushing up the river. Procter was on the scene again, and no sooner had his four hundred regulars found a landing place than a curt demand for surrender came to Major Croghan. The British howitzers peppered the stockade as soon as the refusal was delivered, but they failed to shake the spirit of the dauntless hundred and sixty American defenders. On the following day, the 2d of August, Procter stupidly repeated his error of a direct assault upon sheltered riflemen, which had cost him heavily at the Raisin and at Fort Meigs. He ordered his redcoats to carry Fort Stephenson. Again and again they marched forward until all the officers had been shot down and a fifth of the force was dead or wounded. American valor and marksmanship had proved themselves in the face of heavy odds. At sunset the beaten British were flocking into their boats, and Procter was again on his way to Amherstburg. His excuse for the trouncing laid the blame on the Indians:

The troops, after the artillery had been used for some hours, attacked two faces and, impossibilities being attempted, failed. The fort, from which the severest fire I ever saw was maintained during the attack, was well defended. The troops displayed the greatest bravery, the much greater part of whom reached the fort and made every effort to enter; but the Indians who had proposed the assault and, had it not been assented to, would have ever stigmatized the British character, scarcely came into fire before they ran out of its reach. A more than adequate sacrifice having been made to Indian opinion, I drew off the brave assailants.

The sound of Croghan's guns was heard in General Harrison's camp at Seneca, ten miles up the river. Harrison had nothing to say but this: "The blood be upon his own head. I wash my hands of it." This was a misguided speech which the country received with marked disfavor while it acclaimed young Croghan as the sterling hero of the western campaign. He could be also a loyal as well as a successful subordinate, for he ably defended Harrison against the indignation which menaced his station as commander of the army. The new Secretary of War, John Armstrong, ironically referred to Procter and Harrison as being always in terror of each other, the one actually flying from his supposed pursuer after his fiasco at

Fort Stephenson, the other waiting only for the arrival of Croghan at Seneca to begin a camp conflagration and flight to Upper Sandusky.

The reconquest of Michigan and the Northwest depended now on the American navy. Harrison wisely halted his inglorious operations by land until the ships and sailors were ready to coöperate. Because the British sway on the Great Lakes was unchallenged, the general situation of the enemy was immensely better than it had been at the beginning of the campaign. During a year of war the United States had steadily lost in men, in territory, in prestige, and this in spite of the fact that the opposing forces across the Canadian border were much smaller.

That the men of the American navy would be prompt to maintain the traditions of the service was indicated in a small way by an incident of the previous year on Lake Erie. In September, 1812, Lieutenant Jesse D. Elliott had been sent to Buffalo to find a site for building naval vessels. A few weeks later he was fitting out several purchased schooners behind Squaw Island. Suddenly there came sailing in from Amherstburg and anchored off Fort Erie two British armed brigs, the *Detroit* which had been surrendered by Hull, and the



*Caledonia* which had helped to subdue the American garrison at Mackinac. Elliott had no ships ready for action, but he was not to be daunted by such an obstacle. It so happened that ninety Yankee seamen had been sent across country from New York by Captain Isaac Chauncey. These worthy tars had trudged the distance on foot, a matter of five hundred miles, with their canvas bags on their backs, and they rolled into port at noon, in the nick of time to serve Elliott's purpose. They were indubitably tired, but he gave them not a moment for rest. A ration of meat and bread and a stiff tot of grog, and they turned to and manned the boats which were to cut out the two British brigs when darkness fell.

Elliott scraped together fifty soldiers and, filling two cutters with his amphibious company, he stole out of Buffalo and pulled toward Fort Erie. At one o'clock in the morning of the 9th of October they were alongside the pair of enemy brigs and together the bluejackets and the infantry tumbled over the bulwarks with cutlass, pistols, and boarding pike. In ten minutes both vessels were captured and under sail for the American shore. The *Caledonia* was safely beached at Black Rock, where Elliott was building his little navy yard. The

wind, however, was so light that the *Detroit* was swept downward by the river current and had to anchor under the fire of British batteries. These she fought with her guns until all her powder was shot away. Then she cut her cable, hoisted sail again, and took the bottom on Squaw Island, where both British and American guns had the range of her. Elliott had to abandon her and set fire to the hull, but he afterward recovered her ordnance.

What Elliott had in mind shows the temper of this ready naval officer. "A strong inducement," he wrote, "was that with these two vessels and those I have purchased, I should be able to meet the remainder of the British force on the Upper Lakes." The loss of the *Detroit* somewhat disappointed this ambitious scheme but the success of the audacious adventure foreshadowed later and larger exploits with far-reaching results. Isaac Brock, the British general in Canada, had the genius to comprehend the meaning of this naval exploit. "This event is particularly unfortunate," he wrote, "and may reduce us to incalculable distress. The enemy is making every exertion to gain a naval superiority on both lakes; which, if they accomplish, I do not see how we can retain the country." And to Procter, his commander at

Detroit, he disclosed the meaning of the naval loss as it affected the fortunes of the western campaign: "This will reduce us to great distress. You will have the goodness to state the expedients you possess to enable us to replace, as far as possible, the heavy loss we have suffered in the *Detroit*."

But another year was required to teach the American Government the lesson that a few small vessels roughly pegged together of planks sawn from the forest, with a few hundred seamen and guns, might be far more decisive than the random operations of fifty thousand troops. This lesson, however, was at last learnt; and so, in the summer of 1813, General William Henry Harrison waited at Seneca on the Sandusky River until he received, on the 10th of September, the deathless despatch of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry: "We have met the enemy and they are ours." The navy had at last cleared the way for the army.

Expeditionously forty-five hundred infantry were embarked and set ashore only three miles from the coveted fort at Amherstburg. A mounted regiment of a thousand Kentuckians, raised for frontier defense by Richard M. Johnson, moved along the road to Detroit. Harrison was about to square accounts with Procter, who had no stomach for a

stubborn defense. Tecumseh, still loyal to the British cause, summoned thirty-five hundred of his warriors to the royal standard to stem this American invasion. They expected that Procter would offer a courageous resistance, for he had also almost a thousand hard-bitted British troops, seasoned by a year's fighting. But Procter's sun had set and disgrace was about to overtake him. To Tecumseh, a chieftain who had waged war because of the wrongs suffered by his own people, the thought of flight in this crisis was cowardly and intolerable. When Procter announced that he proposed to seek refuge in retreat, Tecumseh told him to his face that he was like a fat dog which had carried its tail erect and now that it was frightened dropped its tail between its legs and ran. The English might scamper as far as they liked but the Indians would remain to meet the American invaders.

It was a helter-skelter exodus from Amherstburg and Detroit. All property that could not be moved was burned or destroyed, and Procter set out for Moraviantown, on the Thames River, seventy miles along the road to Lake Ontario. Harrison, amazed at this behavior, reported: "Nothing but infatuation could have governed General Procter's conduct. The day I landed

below Malden [Amherstburg] he had at his disposal upward of three thousand Indian warriors; his regular force reinforced by the militia of the district would have made his number nearly equal to my aggregate, which on the day of landing did not exceed forty-five hundred. . . . His inferior officers say that his conduct has been a series of continued blunders.”

Procter had put a week behind him before Harrison set out from Amherstburg in pursuit, but the British column was hampered in flight by the women and children of the deserted posts, the sick and wounded, the wagon trains, the stores, and baggage. The organization had gone to pieces because of the demoralizing example set by its leader. A hundred miles of wilderness lay between the fugitives and a place of refuge. Overtaken on the Thames River, they were given no choice. It was fight or surrender. Ahead of the American infantry brigades moved Johnson's mounted Kentuckians, armed with muskets, rifles, knives, and tomahawks, and led by a resourceful and enterprising soldier. Procter was compelled to form his lines of battle across the road on the north bank of the Thames or permit this formidable American cavalry to trample his straggling ranks under hoof.



Tecumseh's Indians, stationed in a swamp, covered his right flank and the river covered his left. Harrison came upon the enemy early in the afternoon of the 5th of October and formed his line of battle. The action was carried on in a manner "not sanctioned by anything that I had seen or heard of," said Harrison afterwards. This first American victory of the war on land was, indeed, quite irregular and unconventional. It was won by Johnson's mounted riflemen, who divided and charged both the redcoats in front and the Indians in the swamp. One detachment galloped through the first and second lines of the British infantry while the other drove the Indians into the American left wing and smashed them utterly. Tecumseh was among the slain. It was all over in one hour and twenty minutes. Harrison's foot soldiers had no chance to close with the enemy. The Americans lost only fifteen killed and thirty wounded, and they took about five hundred prisoners and all Procter's artillery, muskets, baggage, and stores.

Not only was the Northwest Territory thus regained for the United States but the power of the Indian alliance was broken. Most of the hostile tribes now abandoned the British cause. Tecumseh's confederacy of Indian nations fell to pieces

with the death of its leader. The British army of Upper Canada, shattered and unable to receive reinforcements from overseas, no longer menaced Michigan and the western front of the American line. General Harrison returned to Detroit at his leisure, and the volunteers and militia marched homeward, for no more than two regular brigades were needed to protect all this vast area. The struggle for its possession was a closed episode. In this quarter, however, the war cry "On to Canada!" was no longer heard. The United States was satisfied to recover what it had lost with Hull's surrender and to rid itself of the peril of invasion and the horrors of Indian massacres along its wilderness frontiers. Of the men prominent in the struggle, Procter suffered official disgrace at the hands of his own Government and William Henry Harrison became a President of the United States.

## CHAPTER III

### PERRY AND LAKE ERIE

AMID the prolonged vicissitudes of these western campaigns, two subordinate officers, the boyish Major Croghan at Fort Stephenson and the dashing Colonel Johnson with his Kentucky mounted infantry, displayed qualities which accord with the best traditions of American arms. Of kindred spirit and far more illustrious was Captain Oliver Hazard Perry of the United States Navy. Perry dealt with and overcame, on a much larger scale, similar obstacles and discouragements — untrained men, lack of material, faulty support — but was ready and eager to meet the enemy in the hour of need. If it is a sound axiom never to despise the enemy, it is nevertheless true that excessive prudence has lost many an action. Farragut's motto has been the keynote of the success of all the great sea-captains, "*L'audace, et encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace.*"

It was not until the lesson of Hull's surrender had aroused the civil authorities that Captain Chauncey of the navy yard at New York received orders in September, 1812, "to assume command of the naval force on Lakes Erie and Ontario and to use every exertion to obtain control of them this fall." Chauncey was an experienced officer, forty years old, who had not rusted from inactivity like the elderly generals who had been given command of armies. He knew what he needed and how to get it. Having to begin with almost nothing, he busied himself to such excellent purpose that he was able to report within three weeks that he had forwarded to Sackett's Harbor on Lake Ontario, "one hundred and forty ship carpenters, seven hundred seamen and marines, more than one hundred pieces of cannon, the greater part of large caliber, with musket, shot, carriages, etc. The carriages have nearly all been made and the shot cast in that time. Nay, I may say that nearly every article that has been forwarded has been made."

It was found impossible to divert part of this ordnance to Buffalo because of the excessively bad roads, which were passable for heavy traffic only by means of sleds during the snows of winter. This

obstacle spoiled the hope of putting a fighting force afloat on Lake Erie during the latter part of 1812. Chauncey consequently established his main base at Sackett's Harbor and lost no time in building and buying vessels. In forty-five days from laying the keel he launched a ship of the corvette class, a third larger than the ocean cruisers *Wasp* and *Hornet*, "and nine weeks ago," said he, "the timber that she is composed of was growing in the forest."

Lieutenant Elliott at the same time had not been idle in his little navy yard at Black Rock near Buffalo, where he had assembled a small brig and several schooners. In December Chauncey inspected the work and decided to shift it to Presqu' Isle, now the city of Erie, which was much less exposed to interference by the enemy. Here he got together the material for two brigs of three hundred tons each, which were to be the main strength of Perry's squadron nine months later. Impatient to return to Lake Ontario, where a fleet in being was even more urgently needed, Chauncey was glad to receive from Commander Oliver Hazard Perry an application to serve under him. To Perry was promptly turned over the burden and the responsibility of smashing the British naval power on Lake Erie. Events were soon to display the notable



differences in temperament and capabilities between these two men. Though he had greater opportunities on Lake Ontario, Chauncey was too cautious and held the enemy in too much respect; wherefore he dodged and parried and fought inconclusive engagements with the fleet of Sir James Yeo until destiny had passed him by. He lives in history as a competent and enterprising chief of dockyards and supplies but not as a victorious seaman.

To Perry, in the flush of his youth at twenty-eight years, was granted the immortal spark of greatness to do and dare and the personality which impelled men gladly to serve him and to die for him. His difficulties were huge, but he attacked them with a confidence which nothing could dismay. First he had to concentrate his divided force. Lieutenant Elliott's flotilla of schooners at that time lay at Black Rock. It was necessary to move them to Erie at great risk of capture by the enemy, but vigilance and seamanship accomplished this feat. It then remained to finish and equip the larger vessels which were being built. Two of these were the brigs ordered laid down by Chauncey, the *Lawrence* and the *Niagara*. Apart from these, the battle squadron consisted of seven small schooners and the captured British brig, the

*Caledonia*. In size and armament they were absurd cockleshells even when compared with a modern destroyer, but they were to make themselves superbly memorable. Perry's flagship was no larger than the ancient coasting schooners which ply today between Bangor and Boston with cargoes of lumber and coal.

Through the winter and spring of 1813, the carpenters, calkers, and smiths were fitting the new vessels together from the green timber and planking which the choppers and sawyers wrought out of the forest. The iron, the canvas, and all the other material had to be hauled by horses and oxen from places several hundred miles distant. Late in July the squadron was ready for active service but was dangerously short of men. This, however, was the least of Perry's concerns. He had reckoned that seven hundred and forty officers and sailors were required to handle and fight his ships, but he did not hesitate to put to sea with a total force of four hundred and ninety.

Of these a hundred were soldiers sent him only nine days before he sailed, and most of them trod a deck for the first time. Chauncey was so absorbed in his own affairs and hazards on Lake Ontario that he was not likely to give Perry any more men than

could be spared. This reluctance caused Perry to send a spirited protest in which he said: "The men that came by Mr. Champlin are a motley set, blacks, soldiers, and boys. I cannot think you saw them after they were selected."

As the superior officer, Chauncey resented the criticism and replied with this warning reproof: "As you have assured the Secretary that you should conceive yourself equal or superior to the enemy, with a force of men so much less than I had deemed necessary, there will be a great deal expected from you by your country, and I trust they will not be disappointed in the high expectations formed of your gallantry and judgment."

The quick temper of Perry flared at this. He was about to sail in search of the British fleet with what men he had because he was unable to obtain more, and he had rightly looked to Chauncey to supply the deficiency. Impulsively he asked to be relieved of his command and gave expression to his sense of grievance in a letter to the Secretary of the Navy in which he said, among other things: "I cannot serve under an officer who has been so totally regardless of my feelings. . . . The critical state of General Harrison was such that I took upon myself the responsibility of going out with the few

young officers you had been pleased to send me, with the few seamen I had, and as many volunteers as I could muster from the militia. I did not shrink from this responsibility but, Sir, at that very moment I surely did not anticipate the receipt of a letter in every line of which is an insult." Most fortunately Perry's request for transfer could not be granted until after the battle of Lake Erie had been fought and won. The Secretary answered in tones of mild rebuke: "A change of commander under existing circumstances, is equally inadmissible as it respects the interest of the service and your own reputation. It is right that you should reap the harvest which you have sown."

Perry's indignation seems excusable. He had shown a cheerful willingness to shoulder the whole load and his anxieties had been greater than his superiors appeared to realize. Captain Barclay, who commanded the British naval force on Lake Erie and who had been hovering off Erie while the American ships were waiting for men, might readily have sent his boats in at night and destroyed the entire squadron. Perry had not enough sailors to defend his ships, and the regiment of Pennsylvania militia stationed at Erie to guard the naval base refused to do duty on shipboard after dark

"I told the boys to go, Captain Perry," explained their worthless colonel, "but the boys won't go."

Perry's lucky star saved him from disaster, however, and on the 2d of August he undertook the perilous and awkward labor of floating his larger vessels over the shallow bar of the harbor at Erie. Barclay's blockading force had vanished. For Perry it was then or never. At any moment the enemy's topsails might reappear, and the American ships would be caught in a situation wholly defenseless. Perry first disposed his light-draft schooners to cover his channel, and then hoisted out the guns of the *Lawrence* brig and lowered them into boats. Scows, or "camels," as they were called, were lashed alongside the vessel to lift her when the water was pumped out of them. There was no more than four feet of water on the bar, and the brig-of-war bumped and stranded repeatedly even when lightened and assisted in every possible manner. After a night and a day of unflagging exertion she was hauled across into deep water and the guns were quickly slung aboard. The *Niagara* was coaxed out of harbor in the same ingenious fashion, and on the 4th of August Perry was able to report that all his vessels were over the



bar, although Barclay had returned by now and "the enemy had been in sight all day."

Perry endeavored to force an engagement without delay, but the British fleet retired to Amherstburg because Barclay was waiting for a new and powerful ship, the *Detroit*, and he preferred to spar for time. The American vessels thereupon anchored off Erie and took on stores. They had fewer than three hundred men aboard, and it was bracing news for Perry to receive word that a hundred officers and men under Commander Jesse D. Elliott were hastening to join him. Elliott became second in command to Perry and assumed charge of the *Niagara*.

For almost a month the Stars and Stripes flew unchallenged from the masts of the American ships. Perry made his base at Put-in Bay, thirty miles southeast of Amherstburg, where he could intercept the enemy passing eastward. The British commander, Barclay, had also been troubled by lack of seamen and was inclined to postpone action. He was nevertheless urged on by Sir George Prevost, the Governor General of Canada, who told him that "he had only to dare and he would be successful." A more urgent call on Barclay to fight was due to the lack of food in the Amherstburg region,

where the water route was now blockaded by the American ships. The British were feeding fourteen thousand Indians, including warriors and their families, and if provisions failed the red men would be likely to vanish.

At sunrise of the 10th of September, a sailor at the masthead of the *Lawrence* sighted the British squadron steering across the lake with a fair wind and ready to give battle. Perry instantly sent his crews to quarters and trimmed sail to quit the bay and form his line in open water. He was eager to take the initiative, and it may be assumed that he had forgotten Chauncey's prudent admonition: "The first object will be to destroy or cripple the enemy's fleet; but in all attempts upon the fleet you ought to use great caution, for the loss of a single vessel may decide the fate of a campaign."

Small, crude, and hastily manned as were the ships engaged in this famous fresh-water battle, it should be borne in mind that the proven principles of naval strategy and tactics used were as sound and true as when Nelson and Rodney had demonstrated them in mighty fleet actions at sea. In the final council in his cabin, Perry echoed Nelson's words in saying that no captain could go very far wrong who placed his vessel close alongside those

of the enemy. Chauncey's counsel, on the other hand, would have lost the battle. Perry's decision to give and take punishment, no matter if it should cost him a ship or two, won him the victory.

The British force was inferior, both in the number of vessels and the weight of broadsides, but this inferiority was somewhat balanced by the greater range and hitting power of Barclay's longer guns. Each had what might be called two heavy ships of the line: the British, the *Detroit* and the *Queen Charlotte*, and the Americans, the *Lawrence* and the *Niagara*. Next in importance and fairly well matched were the *Lady Prevost* under Barclay's flag and the *Caledonia* under Perry's. There remained the light schooner craft of which the American squadron had six and the British only three. Perry realized that if he could put ship against ship the odds would be largely in his favor, for, with his batteries of carronades which threw their shot but a short distance, he would be unwise to maneuver for position and let the enemy pound him to pieces at long range. His plan of battle was therefore governed entirely by his knowledge of Barclay's strength and of the possibilities of his own forces.

With a light breeze and working to windward,

Perry's ship moved to intercept the British squadron which lay in column, topsails aback and waiting. The American brigs were fanned ahead by the air which breathed in their lofty canvas, but the schooners were almost becalmed and four of them straggled in the rear, their crews tugging at the long sweeps or oars. Two of the faster of these, the *Scorpion* and the *Ariel*, were slipping along in the van where they supported the American flagship *Lawrence*, and Perry had no intention of delaying for the others to come up. Shortly before noon Barclay opened the engagement with the long guns of the *Detroit*, but as yet Perry was unable to reach his opponent and made more sail on the *Lawrence* in order to get close.

The British gunners of the *Detroit* were already finding the target, and Perry discovered that the *Lawrence* was difficult to handle with much of her rigging shot away. He ranged ahead until his ship was no more than two hundred and fifty yards from the *Detroit*. Even then the distance was greater than desirable for the main battery of carronades. A good golfer can drive his tee shot as far as the space of water which separated these two indomitable flagships as they fought. It was a different kind of naval warfare from that of today

in which superdreadnaughts score hits at battle ranges of twelve and fourteen miles.

Perry's plans were now endangered by the failure of his other heavy ship, the *Niagara*, to take care of her own adversary, the *Queen Charlotte*, which forged ahead and took a station where her broadsides helped to reduce the *Lawrence* to a mass of wreckage. A bitter dispute which challenged the courage and judgment of Commander Elliott of the *Niagara* was the aftermath of this flaw in the conduct of the battle. It was charged that he failed to go to the support of his commander-in-chief when the flagship was being destroyed under his eyes. The facts admit of no doubt: he dropped astern and for two hours remained scarcely more than a spectator of a desperate action in which his ship was sorely needed, whereas if he had followed the order to close up, the *Lawrence* need never have struck to the enemy.

In his defense he stated that lack of wind had prevented him from drawing ahead to engage and divert the *Queen Charlotte* and that he had been instructed to hold a certain position in line. At the time Perry found no fault with him, merely setting down in his report that "at half-past two, the wind springing up, Captain Elliott was enabled to bring



his vessel, the *Niagara*, gallantly into close action." Later Perry formulated charges against his second in command, accusing him of having kept on a course "which would in a few minutes have carried said vessel entirely out of action." These documents were pigeonholed and a Court of Inquiry commended Elliott as a brave and skillful officer who had gained laurels in that "splendid victory."

The issue was threshed out by naval experts who violently disagreed, but there was glory enough for all and the flag had suffered no stain. Certain it is that the battle would have lacked its most brilliantly dramatic episode if Perry had not been compelled to shift his pennant from the blazing hulk of the *Lawrence* and, from the quarter-deck of the *Niagara*, to renew the conflict, rally his vessels, and snatch a triumph from the shadow of disaster. It was one of the great moments in the storied annals of the American navy, comparable with a John Paul Jones shouting "*We have not yet begun to fight!*" from the deck of the shattered, water-logged *Bon Homme Richard*, or a Farragut lashed in the rigging and roaring "*Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!*"

Because of the failure of Elliott to bring the *Niagara* into action at once, as had been laid down

in the plan of battle, Perry found himself in desperate straits aboard the beaten *Lawrence*. Her colors still flew but she could fire only one gun of her whole battery, and more than half the ship's company had been killed or wounded — eighty-three men out of one hundred and forty-two. It was impossible to steer or handle her and she drifted helpless. Then it was that Perry, seeing the laggard *Niagara* close at hand, ordered a boat away and was transferred to a ship which was still fit and ready to continue the action. As soon as he had left them, the survivors of the *Lawrence* hauled down their flag in token of surrender, for there was nothing else for them to do.

As soon as he jumped on deck, Perry took command of the *Niagara*, sending Elliott off to bring up the rearmost schooners. There was no lagging or hesitation now. With topgallant sails sheeted home, the *Niagara* bore down upon the *Detroit*, driven by a freshening breeze. Barclay's crippled flagship tried to avoid being raked and so fouled her consort, the *Queen Charlotte*. The two British ships lay locked together while the American guns pounded them with terrific fire. Presently they got clear of each other and pluckily attempted to carry on the fight. But the odds were hopeless.

The officer whose painful duty it was to signal the surrender of the *Detroit* said of this British flagship: "The ship lying completely unmanageable, every brace cut away, the mizzen-topmast and gaff down, all the other masts badly wounded, not a stay left forward, hull shattered very much, a number of guns disabled, and the enemy's squadron raking both ships ahead and astern, none of our own in a position to support us, I was under the painful necessity of answering the enemy to say we had struck, the *Queen Charlotte* having previously done so."

It was later reported of the *Detroit* that it was "impossible to place a hand upon that broadside which had been exposed to the enemy's fire without covering some portion of a wound, either from grape, round, canister, or chain shot." The crew had suffered as severely as the vessel. The valiant commander of the squadron, Captain Barclay, was a fighting sailor who had lost an arm at Trafalgar. In the battle of Lake Erie he was twice wounded and had to be carried below. His first lieutenant was mortally hurt and in the critical moments the ship was left in charge of the second lieutenant. In this gallant manner did Perry and Barclay, both heirs of the bulldog Anglo-Saxon strain, wage their

bloody duel without faltering and thus did the British sailor keep his honor bright in defeat.

The little American schooners played a part in smashing the enemy. The *Ariel* and *Scorpion* held their positions in the van and their long guns helped deal the finishing blows to the *Detroit*, while the others came up when the breeze grew stronger and engaged their several opponents. The *Caledonia* was effective in putting the *Queen Charlotte* out of action. When the larger British ships surrendered, the smaller craft were compelled to follow the example, and the squadron yielded to Perry after three hours of battle. It was in no boastful strain but as the laconic fact that he sent his famous message to the nation. He had met the enemy and they were all his. It was leadership — brilliant and tenacious — which had employed makeshift vessels, odd lots of guns, and crews which included militia, sick men, and “a motley set of blacks and boys.” Barclay had labored under handicaps no less heavy, but it was his destiny to match himself against a superior force and a man of unquestioned naval genius. Oliver Hazard Perry would have made a name for himself, no doubt, if his career had led him to blue water and the command of stately frigates.

On Lake Ontario, Chauncey dragged his naval campaign through two seasons and then left the enemy in control. Perry, by opening the way for Harrison, rewon the Northwest for the United States because he sagaciously upheld the doctrine of Napoleon that "war cannot be waged without running risks." Behind his daring, however, lay tireless, painstaking preparation and a thorough knowledge of his trade.



## CHAPTER IV

### EBB AND FLOW ON THE NORTHERN FRONT

THE events of the war by land are apt to be as confusing in narration as they were in fact. The many forays, skirmishes, and retreats along the Canadian frontier were campaigns in name only, ambitiously conceived but most haltingly executed. Major General Dearborn, senior officer of the American army, had failed to begin operations in the center and on the eastern flank in time to divert the enemy from Detroit; but in the autumn of 1812 he was ready to attempt an invasion of Canada by way of Niagara. The direct command was given to Major General Stephen Van Rensselaer of the New York State militia, who was to advance as soon as six thousand troops were assembled. At first Dearborn seemed hopeful of success. He predicted that "with the militia and other troops there or on the march, they will be able, I presume, to cross over into Canada, carry

all the works in Niagara, and proceed to the other posts in that province in triumph."

The fair prospect soon clouded, however, and Dearborn, who was of a doubtful, easily discouraged temperament, partly due to age and infirmities, discovered that "a strange fatality seemed to have pervaded the whole arrangements." Yet this was when the movement of troops and supplies was far brisker and better organized than could have been expected and when the armed strength was thrice that of Brock, the British general, who was guarding forty miles of front along the Niagara River with less than two thousand men. At Queenston which was the objective of the first American attack there were no more than two companies of British regulars and a few militia, in all about three hundred troops. The rest of Brock's forces were at Chippawa and Fort Erie, where the heavy assaults were expected.

An American regular brigade was on the march to Buffalo, but its commander, Brigadier General Alexander Smyth, was not subordinate to Van Rensselaer, and the two had quarreled. Smyth paid no attention to a request for a council of war and went his own way. On the night of the 10th of October Van Rensselaer attempted to cross the

Niagara River, but there was some blunder about the boats and the disgruntled troops returned to camp. Two nights later they made another attempt but found the British on the alert and failed to dislodge them from the heights of Queenston. A small body of American regulars, led by gallant young Captain Wool, managed to clamber up a path hitherto regarded as impassable. There they held a precarious position and waited for help. Brock, who was commanding the British in person, was instantly killed while storming this hillside at the head of reinforcements. In him the enemy lost its ablest and most intrepid leader.

The forenoon wore on and Captain Wool, painfully wounded, still clung to the heights with his two hundred and fifty men. A relief column which crossed the river found itself helpless for lack of artillery and intrenching tools and was compelled to fall back. Van Rensselaer forgot his bickering with General Smyth and sent him urgent word to hasten to the rescue. Winfield Scott, then a lieutenant colonel, came forward as a volunteer and took command of young Captain Wool's forlorn hope. Gradually more men trickled up the heights until the ground was defended by three hundred and fifty regulars and two hundred and fifty militia.

Meanwhile the British troops were mustering up the river at Chippawa, and the red lines of their veterans were descried advancing from Fort George below. Bands of Indians raced by field and forest to screen the British movements and to harass the American lines. The tragic turn of events appears to have dazed General Van Rensselaer. The failure to save the beleaguered and outnumbered Americans on the heights he blamed upon his troops, reporting next day that his reinforcements embarked very slowly. "I passed immediately over to accelerate them," said he, "but to my utter astonishment I found that at the very moment when complete victory was in our hands the ardor of the unengaged troops had entirely subsided. I rode in all directions, urged the men by every consideration to pass over; but in vain."

The candid fact seems to be that this general of militia had made a sorry mess of the whole affair, and his men had lost all faith in his ability to turn the adverse tide. He stood and watched six hundred valiant American soldiers make their last stand on the rocky eminence while the British hurled more and more men up the slope. One concerted attack by the idle American army would have swept them away like chaff. But there was only

one Winfield Scott in the field, and his lot was cast with those who fought to the bitter end as a sacrifice to stupidity. The six hundred were surrounded. They were pushed back by weight of opposing numbers. Still they died in their tracks, until the survivors were actually pushed over a cliff and down to the bank of the river.

There they surrendered, for there were no boats to carry them across. The boatmen had fled to cover as soon as the Indians opened fire on them. Winfield Scott was among the prisoners together with a brigadier general and two more lieutenant colonels who had been bagged earlier in the day. Ninety Americans were killed and many more wounded, while a total of nine hundred were captured during the entire action. Van Rensselaer had lost almost as many troops as Hull had lost at Detroit, and he had nothing to show for it. He very sensibly resigned his command on the next day.

The choice of his successor, however, was again unfortunate. Brigadier General Alexander Smyth had been inspector general in the regular army before he was given charge of an infantry brigade. He had a most flattering opinion of himself, and promotion to the command of an army quite turned his head. The oratory with which he proceeded

to bombard friend and foe strikes the one note of humor in a chapter that is otherwise depressing. Through the newspapers he informed his troops that their valor had been conspicuous "but the nation has been unfortunate in the selection of some of those who have directed it. . . . The cause of these miscarriages is apparent. The commanders were popular men, 'destitute alike of theory and experience' in the art of war." "In a few days," he announced, "the troops under my command will plant the American standard in Canada. They are men accustomed to obedience, silence, and steadiness. They will conquer or they will die. Will you stand with your arms folded and look on this interesting struggle? . . . Has the race degenerated? Or have you, under the baneful influence of contending factions, forgot your country? . . . Shame, where is thy blush? No!"

This invasion of Canada was to be a grim, deadly business; no more trifling. His heroic troops were to hold their fire until they were within *five paces* of the enemy, and then to charge bayonets with shouts. They were to think on their country's honor torn, her rights trampled on, her sons enslaved, her infants perishing by the hatchet, not forgetting to be strong and brave and to let the



ruffian power of the British King cease on this continent.

Buffalo was the base of this particular conquest of Canada. The advance guard would cross the Niagara River from Black Rock to destroy the enemy's batteries, after which the army was to move onward, three thousand strong. The first detachments crossed the river early in the morning on the 28th of November and did their work well and bravely and captured the guns in spite of heavy loss. The troops then began to embark at sunrise, but by noon only twelve hundred were in boats. Upstream they moved at a leisurely pace and went ashore for dinner. The remainder of the three thousand, however, had failed to appear, and Smyth refused to invade unless he had the full number. Altogether, four thousand troops, all regulars, had been sent to Niagara but many of them had been disabled by sickness.

General Smyth then called a council of war, shifted the responsibility from his own shoulders, and decided to delay the invasion. Again he changed his mind and ordered the men into the boats two days later. Fifteen hundred men answered the summons. Again the general marched them ashore after another council of war, and then

and there he abandoned his personal conquest of Canada. His army literally melted away, "about four thousand men without order or restraint discharging their muskets in every direction," writes an eyewitness. They riddled the general's tent with bullets by way of expressing their opinion of him, and he left the camp not more than two leaps ahead of his earnest troops. He requested permission to visit his family, after the newspapers had branded him as a coward, and the visit became permanent. His name was dropped from the army rolls without the formality of an inquiry. It seemed rather too much for the country to bear that, in the first year of the war, its armies should have suffered from the failures of Hull, Van Rensselaer, and Smyth.

It had been hoped that General Dearborn might carry out his own idea of an operation against Montreal at the same time as the Niagara campaign was in progress. On the shore of Lake Champlain, Dearborn was in command of the largest and most promising force under the American flag, including seven regiments of the regular army. Taking personal charge at Plattsburg, he marched this body of troops twenty miles in the direction of the Canadian border. Here the militia refused to go

on, and he marched back again after four days in the field. Beset with rheumatism and low spirits, he wrote to the Secretary of War: "I had anticipated disappointment and misfortune in the commencement of the war, but I did by no means apprehend such a deficiency of regular troops and such a series of disasters as we have witnessed." Coupled with this complaint was the request that he might be allowed "to retire to the shades of private life and remain a mere but interested spectator of passing events."

The Government, however, was not yet ready to release Major General Dearborn but instructed him to organize an offensive which should obtain control of the St. Lawrence River and thereby cut communication between Upper and Lower Canada. This was the pet plan of Armstrong when he became Secretary of War, and as soon as was possible he set the military machinery in motion. In February, 1813, Armstrong told Dearborn to assemble four thousand men at Sackett's Harbor, on Lake Ontario, and three thousand at Buffalo. The larger force was to cross the lake in the spring, protected by Chauncey's fleet, capture the important naval station of Kingston, then attack York (Toronto), and finally join the corps at Buffalo for

another operation against the British on the Niagara River. But Dearborn was not eager for the enterprise. He explained that he lacked sufficient strength for an operation against Kingston. With the support of Commodore Chauncey he proposed a different offensive which should be aimed first against York, then against Niagara, and finally against Kingston. This proposal reversed Armstrong's programme, and he permitted it to sway his decision. Thus the war turned westward from the St. Lawrence.

The only apparent success in this campaign occurred at York, the capital of Upper Canada, where on the 27th of April one ship under construction was burned and another captured after the small British garrison had been driven inland. The public buildings were also destroyed by fire, though Dearborn protested that this was done against his orders. In the next year, however, the enemy retaliated by burning the Capitol at Washington. The fighting at York was bloody, and the American forces counted a fifth killed or wounded. They remained on the Canadian side only ten days and then returned to disembark at Niagara. Here Dearborn fell ill, and his chief of staff, Colonel Winfield Scott, was left in virtual control of the army.

In May, 1813, most of the troops at Plattsburg and Sackett's Harbor were moved to the Niagara region for the purpose of a grand movement to take Fort George, at the mouth of that river, from the rear and thus redeem the failure of the preceding campaign. Commodore Chauncey with his Ontario fleet was prepared to coöperate and to transport the troops. Three American brigadiers, Boyd, Winder, and Chandler, effected a landing in handsome fashion, while Winfield Scott led an advance division. Under cover of the ships they proceeded along the beach and turned the right flank of the British defenses. Fort George was evacuated, but most of the force escaped and made their way to Queenston, whence they continued to retreat westward along the shore of Lake Ontario. Vincent, the British general, reported his losses in killed and wounded and missing as three hundred and fifty-six. The Americans suffered far less. It was a clean-cut, workmanlike operation, and, according to an observer, "Winfield Scott fought nine-tenths of the battle." But the chief aim had been to destroy the British force, and in this the adventure failed.

General Dearborn was not at all reconciled to letting the garrison of Fort George get clean away

from him, and he therefore sent General Winder in pursuit with a thousand men. These were reinforced by as many more; and together they followed the trail of the retreating British to Stony Creek and camped there for the night. Vincent and his sixteen hundred British regulars were in bivouac ten miles beyond. The mishap at Fort George had by no means knocked the fight out of them. Vincent himself led six hundred men back in the middle of a black night (the 6th of June) and fell upon the American camp. A confused battle followed. The two forces intermingled in cursing, stabbing, swirling groups. The American generals, Chandler and Winder, walked straight into the enemy's arms and were captured. The British broke through and took the American batteries but failed to keep them. At length both parties retired, badly punished. The Americans had lost all ardor for pursuit and on the following day retreated ten miles and were soon ordered to return to Fort George.

General Dearborn was much distressed by this unlucky episode and was in such feeble health that he again begged to be relieved. He was, he said, "so reduced in strength as to be incapable of any command." General Morgan Lewis took temporary



command at Niagara, but, being soon called to Sackett's Harbor, he was succeeded by General Boyd, whom Lewis was kind enough to describe, by way of recommendation, in these terms: "A compound of ignorance, vanity, and petulance, with nothing to recommend him but that species of bravery in the field which is vamping, boisterous, stifling reflection, blinding observation, and better adapted to the bully than the soldier."

In order to live up to this encomium, Boyd sent Colonel Boerstler on the 24th of June, with four hundred infantry and two guns, to bombard and take an annoying stone house a day's march from Fort George. But two hundred hostile Indians so alarmed Boerstler that he attempted to retreat. Thirty hostile militia then caused him to halt the retreat and send for reinforcements. The reinforcements came to the number of a hundred and fifty, but the British also appeared with forty-seven more men. Colonel Boerstler thereupon surrendered his total of five hundred and forty soldiers. General Dearborn, still the nominal commander of the forces, sadly mentioned the disaster as "an unfortunate and unaccountable event."

There is a better account to be given, however, of events at Sackett's Harbor in this same month

of May. The operations on the Niagara front had stripped this American naval base of troops and of the protection of Chauncey's fleet. Sir George Prevost, the Governor in Chief of Canada, could not let the opportunity slip, although he was not notable for energy. He embarked with a force of regulars, eight hundred men, on Sir James Yeo's ships at Kingston and sailed across Lake Ontario.

Sackett's Harbor was defended by only four hundred regulars of several regiments and about two hundred and fifty militia from Albany. Couriers rode through the countryside as soon as the British ships were sighted, and several hundred volunteers came straggling in from farm and shop and mill. In them was something of the old spirit of Lexington and Bunker Hill, and to lead them there was a real man and a soldier with his two feet under him, Jacob Brown, a brigadier general of the state militia, who consented to act in the emergency. He knew what to do and how to communicate to his men his own unshaken courage. On the beach of the beautiful little harbor he posted five hundred of his militia and volunteers to hamper the British landing. His second line was composed of regulars. In rear were the forts with the guns manned.

The British grenadiers were thrown ashore at

dawn on the 28th of May under a wicked fire from American muskets and rifles, but their disciplined ranks surged forward, driving the militia back at the point of the bayonet and causing even the regulars to give ground. The regulars halted at a blockhouse, where they had also the log barracks and timbers of the shipyard for a defense, and there they stayed in spite of the efforts of the British grenadiers to dislodge them. Jacob Brown, stout-hearted and undismayed, rallied his militia in new positions. Of the engagement a British officer said: "I do not exaggerate when I tell you that the shot, both of musketry and grape, was falling about us like hail. . . . Those who were left of the troops behind the barracks made a dash out to charge the enemy; but the fire was so destructive that they were instantly turned by it, and the retreat was sounded. Sir George, fearless of danger and disdaining to run or to suffer his men to run, repeatedly called out to them to retire in order; many, however, made off as fast as they could."

Before the retreat was sounded, the British expedition had suffered severely. One man in three was killed or wounded, and the rest of them narrowly escaped capture. Jacob Brown serenely reported to General Dearborn that "the militia were

all rallied before the enemy gave way and were marching perfectly in his view towards the rear of his right flank; and I am confident that even then, if Sir George had not retired with the utmost precipitation to his boats, he would have been cut off."

Though he had given the enemy a sound thrashing, Jacob Brown found his righteous satisfaction spoiled by the destruction of the naval barracks, shipping, and storehouses. This was the act of a flighty lieutenant of the American navy who concluded too hastily that the battle was lost and therefore set fire to the buildings to keep the supplies and vessels out of the enemy's hands. Jacob Brown in his straightforward fashion emphatically placed the blame where it belonged:

The burning of the marine barracks was as infamous a transaction as ever occurred among military men. The fire was set as the enemy met our regulars upon the main line; and if anything could have appalled these gallant men it would have been the flames in their rear. We have all, I presume, suffered in the public estimation in consequence of this disgraceful burning. The fact is, however, that the army is entitled to much higher praise than though it had not occurred. The navy alone are responsible for what happened on Navy Point and it is fortunate for them that they have reputations sufficient to sustain the shock.

A few weeks later General Dearborn, after his repeated failures to shake the British grip on the Niagara front and the misfortunes which had darkened his campaigns, was retired according to his wish. But the American nation was not yet rid of its unsuccessful generals. James Wilkinson, who was inscrutably chosen to succeed Dearborn, was a man of bad reputation and low professional standing. "The selection of this unprincipled imbecile," said Winfield Scott, "was not the blunder of Secretary Armstrong." Added to this, Wilkinson was a man of broken health. He was shifted from command at New Orleans because the Southern Senators insisted that he was untrustworthy and incompetent. The regular army regarded him with contempt.

Secretary Armstrong endeavored to mend matters by making his own headquarters at Sackett's Harbor, where the next offensive, directed against Montreal, was planned under his direction. Success hung upon the coöperation and junction of two armies moving separately, the one under Wilkinson descending the St. Lawrence, the other under Wade Hampton setting out from Plattsburg on Lake Champlain. The fact that these two officers had hated each other for years made a difficult problem

no easier. Hampton possessed uncommon ability and courage, but he was proud and sensitive, as might have been expected in a South Carolina gentleman, and he loathed Wilkinson with all his heart. That he should yield the seniority to one whom he considered a blackguard was to him intolerable, and he accepted the command on Lake Champlain with the understanding that he would take no orders from Wilkinson until the two armies were combined.

The expedition from Sackett's Harbor was ready to advance by way of the St. Lawrence in October, 1813, and comprised seven thousand effective troops. Even then the commanding general and the Secretary of War had begun to regard the adventure as dubious and were accusing each other of dodging the responsibility. Said Wilkinson to Armstrong: "It is necessary to my justification that you should, by the authority of the President, direct the operations of the army under my command particularly against Montreal." Said Armstrong to Wilkinson: "I speak conjecturally, but should we surmount every obstacle in descending the river we shall advance upon Montreal ignorant of the force arrayed against us and in case of misfortune having no retreat, the army must surrender



at discretion.” This was scarcely the spirit to inspire a conquering army. As though to clinch his lack of faith in the enterprise, the Secretary of War ordered winter quarters built for ten thousand men many miles this side of Montreal, explaining in later years that he had suspected the campaign would terminate as it did, “with the disgrace of doing nothing.”

On the 17th of October the army embarked in bateaux and coasted along Lake Ontario to the entrance of the St. Lawrence. After being delayed by stormy weather, the flotilla passed the British guns across from Ogdensburg and halted twenty miles below. There Wilkinson called a council of war to decide whether to proceed or retreat. Four generals voted to attack Montreal and two were reluctant but could see “no other alternative.” Wilkinson then became ill and was unable to leave his boat or to give orders. Several British gunboats evaded Chauncey’s blockade and annoyed the rear of the expedition. Eight hundred British infantry from Kingston followed along shore and peppered the boats with musketry and canister wherever the river narrowed. Finally it became necessary for the Americans to land a force to drive the enemy away. Jacob Brown took a brigade and

cleared the bank in advance of the flotilla which floated down to a farm called Chrystler's and moored for the night.

General Boyd, who had been sent back with a strong force to protect the rear, reported next morning that the enemy was advancing in column. He was told to turn back and attack. This he did with three brigades. It was a brilliant opportunity to capture or destroy eight hundred British troops led by a dashing naval officer, Captain Mulcaster. Boyd lived up to his reputation, which was such that Jacob Brown had refused to serve under him. At this engagement of Chrystler's Farm, with two thousand regulars at his disposal, he was unmercifully beaten. Both Wilkinson and Morgan Lewis were flat on their backs, too feeble to concern themselves with battles. The American troops fought without a coherent plan and were defeated and broken in detail. Almost four hundred of them were killed, wounded, or captured. Their conduct reflected the half-hearted attitude of their commanding general and some of his subordinates. The badly mauled brigades hastily took to the boats and ran the rapids, stopping at the first harbor below. There Wilkinson received tidings from Wade Hampton's army which caused him

to abandon the voyage down the St. Lawrence, and it is fair to conjecture that he shed no tears of disappointment.

In September Hampton had led his forces, recruited to four thousand infantry and a few dragoons, from Lake Champlain to the Canadian border in faithful compliance with his instructions to join the movement against Montreal. His line of march was westward to the Chateauguay River where he took a position which menaced both Montreal and that vital artery, the St. Lawrence. Building roads and bringing up supplies, he waited there for Wilkinson to set his own undertaking in motion. Word came from Secretary Armstrong to advance along the river, hold the enemy in check, and prepare to unite with Wilkinson's army. Hampton acted promptly and alarmed the British at Montreal, who foresaw grave consequences and assembled troops from every quarter. Hampton then learned that his army faced an enemy which was of vastly superior strength and which had every advantage of natural defense, while he himself was becoming convinced that Wilkinson was a broken reed and that no further support could be expected from the Government. General Prevost's own reports and letters showed that he had collected in

the Montreal district and available for defense at least fifteen thousand rank and file, including the militia which had been mustered to repel Hampton's advance. The American position at Chateauguay was not less perilous than that of Harrison on the Maumee and far more so than that which had cost Dearborn so many disasters at Niagara.

Hampton moved forward half-heartedly. He had received a message from the War Department that his troops were to prepare winter quarters and these orders confirmed his suspicions that no attempt against Montreal was intended. "These papers sunk my hopes," he wrote in reply, "and raised serious doubts of that efficacious support that had been anticipated. I would have recalled the column, but it was in motion and the darkness of the night rendered it impracticable."

The last words refer to a collision with a small force of Canadian militia, led by Lieutenant Colonel de Salaberry, who had come forward to impede the American advance. These Canadians had obstructed the road with fallen trees and abatis, falling back until they found favorable ground where they very pluckily intrenched themselves. The intrepid party was comprised of a few Glengarry Fencibles and three hundred French-Canadian

Voltigeurs. Colonel de Salaberry was a trained soldier, and he now displayed brilliant courage and resourcefulness. Two American divisions attacking him were unable to carry his breastworks and were driven along the river bank and routed. Hampton's troops abandoned much of their equipment, and returned to camp with a loss of about fifty men.

There was great rejoicing in Canada and rightly so, for a victory had been handsomely won without the aid of British regulars; and Colonel de Salaberry's handful of French Canadians received the credit for thwarting the American plans against Montreal. But, without belittling the signal valor of the achievement, the documentary evidence goes to prove that Hampton's failure was largely due to the neglect of his Government. His state of mind at this time was such that he wrote: "Events have no tendency to change my opinion of the destiny intended for me, nor my determination to retire from a service where I can feel neither security nor expect honor."

With this tame conclusion the armies of Wilkinson and Hampton tucked themselves into log huts for the winter. Both accused the Secretary of War of leading them into an impossible venture and of then deserting them, while he in his turn accepted

their resignations from the army. The fiasco was a costly one in quite another direction, for the Niagara sector had been overlooked in the elaborate attempt to capture Montreal. The few American troops who had gained a foothold on the Canadian side, at Fort George and the village of Niagara, were left unsupported while all the available regulars were sent to the armies of Wilkinson and Hampton. As soon as the British comprehended that the grand invasion had crumbled, they bethought themselves of the tempting opportunity to recover their forts at Niagara.

Wilkinson advised that the Americans evacuate Fort George, which they did on the 10th of December, when five hundred British soldiers were marching to retake it. There was no effort to reinforce the garrison, although at the time ten thousand American troops were idle in winter quarters. Fort Niagara, on the American side, still flew the Stars and Stripes, but on the night of the 18th of December Colonel Murray with five hundred and fifty British regulars rushed the fort, surprised the sentries, and lost only eight men in capturing this stronghold and its three hundred and fifty defenders. It was more like a massacre. Sixty-seven Americans were killed by the bayonet. A few



nights later the Indian allies were loosed against Buffalo and Black Rock and ravaged thirty miles of frontier. The settlements were helpless. The Government had made not the slightest attempt to protect or defend them.

The war had come to the end of its second year, and by land the United States had done no more than to regain what Hull lost at Detroit. The conquest of Canada was a shattered illusion, a sorry tale of wasted energy, misdirected armies, sordid intrigue, lack of organization. A few worthless generals had been swept into the rubbish heap where they belonged, and this was the chief item on the credit side of the ledger. The state militia system had been found wanting; raw levies, defying authority and miserably cared for, had been squandered against a few thousand disciplined British regulars. The nation, angry and bewildered, was taking these lessons to heart. The story of 1814 was to contain far brighter episodes.

## CHAPTER V

### THE NAVY ON BLUE WATER

IT has pleased the American mind to regard the War of 1812 as a maritime conflict. This is natural enough, for the issue was the freedom of the sea, and the achievements of Yankee ships and sailors stood out in brilliant relief against the somber background of the inefficiency of the army. The offensive was thought to be properly a matter for the land forces, which had vastly superior advantages against Canada, while the navy was compelled to act on the defensive against overwhelming odds. The truth is that the navy did amazingly well, though it could not prevent the enemy's squadrons from blockading American ports or raiding the coasts at will. A few single ship actions could not vitally influence the course of the war; but they served to create an imperishable renown for the flag and the service, and to deal a staggering blow to the pride and prestige of an enemy

whose ancient boast it was that Britannia ruled the waves.

The amazing thing is that the navy was able to accomplish anything at all, neglected and almost despised as it was by the same opinion which had suffered the army system to become a melancholy jest. During the decade in which Great Britain captured hundreds of American merchant ships in time of peace and impressed more than six thousand American seamen, the United States built two sloops-of-war of eighteen guns and allowed three of her dozen frigates to hasten to decay at their mooring buoys. Officers in the service were underpaid and shamefully treated by the Government. Captain Bainbridge, an officer of distinction, asked for leave that he might earn money to support himself, giving as a reason: "I have hitherto refused such offers on the presumption that my country would require my services. That presumption is removed, and even doubts entertained of the permanency of the naval establishment."

But, though Congress refused to build more frigates or to formulate a programme for guarding American shores and commerce, the tiny navy kept alive the spark of duty and readiness, while the nation drifted inevitably towards war. There was

no scarcity of capable seamen, for the merchant marine was an admirable training-school. In those far-off days the technique of seafaring and sea fighting was comparatively simple. The merchant seaman could find his way about a frigate, for in rigging, handling, and navigation the ships were very much alike. And the American seamen of 1812 were in fighting mood; they had been whetted by provocation to a keen edge for war. They understood the meaning of "Free Trade and Sailors' Rights," if the landsmen did not. There were strapping sailors in every deep-water port to follow the fife and drum of the recruiting squad. The militia might quibble about "rights," but all the sailors asked was the weather gage of a British man-of-war. They had no patience with such spokesmen as Josiah Quincy, who said that Massachusetts would not go to war to contest the right of Great Britain to search American vessels for British seamen. They had neither forgotten nor forgiven the mortal affront of 1807, when their frigate *Chesapeake*, flying the broad pennant of Commodore James Barron, refused to let the British *Leopard* board and search her, and was fired into without warning and reduced to submission, after twenty-one of the American crew had been killed or wounded.

That shameful episode was in keeping with the attitude of the British navy toward the armed ships of the United States, "a few fir-built things with bits of striped bunting at their mast-heads," as George Canning, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, described them. Long before the declaration of war British squadrons hovered off the port of New York to ransack merchant vessels or to seize them as prizes. In the course of the Napoleonic wars England had met and destroyed the navies of all her enemies in Europe. The battles of Copenhagen, the Nile, Trafalgar, and a hundred lesser fights had thundered to the world the existence of an unconquerable sea power.

Insignificant as it was, the American naval service boasted a history and a high morale. Its ships had been active. The younger officers served with seniors who had sailed and fought with Biddle and Barney and Paul Jones in the Revolution. Many of them had won promotions for gallantry in hand-to-hand combats in boarding parties, for following the bold Stephen Decatur in 1804 when he cut out and set fire to the *Philadelphia*, which had fallen into the hands of pirates at Tripoli, and helping Thomas Truxtun in 1799-1800 when the *Constellation* whipped the Frenchmen, *L'Insurgente*

and *La Vengeance*. In wardroom or steerage almost every man could tell of engagements in which he had behaved with credit. Trained in the school of hard knocks, the sailor knew the value of discipline and gunnery, of the smart ship and the willing crew, while on land the soldier rusted and lost his zeal.

The bluejackets were volunteers, not impressed men condemned to brutal servitude, and they had fought to save their skins in merchant vessels which made their voyages, in peril of privateer, pirate, and picaroon, from the Caribbean to the China Sea. The American merchant marine was at the zenith of its enterprise and daring, attracting the pick and flower of young manhood, and it offered incomparable material for the naval service and the fleets of swift privateers which swarmed out to harry England's commerce.<sup>1</sup>

The American frigates which humbled the haughty Mistress of the Seas beyond all precedent were superior in speed and hitting power to anything of their class afloat. It detracts not at all from the glory they won to remember that in every instance they were larger and of better design and

<sup>1</sup> For an account of the privateers of 1812, see *The Old Merchant Marine*, by Ralph D. Paine (in *The Chronicles of America*).



armament than the British frigates which they shot to pieces with such methodical accuracy.

When war was declared, the American Government was not quite clear as to what should be done with the navy. In New York harbor was a squadron of five ships under Commodore John Rodgers, including two of the heavier frigates or forty-fours, the *President* and the *United States*. Rodgers had also the lighter frigate *Congress*, the brig *Argus*, and the sloop *Hornet*. His orders were to look for British cruisers which were annoying commerce off Sandy Hook, chase them away, and then return to port for "further more extensive and particular orders." One hour after receiving these instructions the eager Rodgers put out to sea, with Captain Stephen Decatur as a squadron commander. The quarry was the frigate *Belvidera*, the most offensive of the British blockading force. This warship was sighted by the *President* and overtaken within forty-eight hours. An unlucky accident then occurred. Instead of running alongside, the *President* began firing at a distance and was hulling the enemy's stern when a gun on the forecastle burst and killed or wounded sixteen American sailors. Commodore Rodgers was picked up with a broken leg. Meanwhile the *Belvidera* cast overboard her

boats and anchors, emptied the fresh water barrels to better her sailing trim, and, crowding on every stitch of canvas, drew away and was lost to view. Rodgers then forgot his orders to return to New York and went off in search of the great convoy of British merchant vessels homeward bound from Jamaica, which was called the plate fleet. He sailed as far as the English Channel before quitting the chase and then cruised back to Boston.

Meanwhile Captain Isaac Hull of the *Constitution* had taken on a crew and stores at Annapolis and was bound up the coast to New York. Hull's luck appeared to be no better than Rodgers's. Off Barnegat he sailed almost into a strong British squadron, which had been sent from Halifax. The escape from this grave predicament was an exploit of seamanship which is among the treasured memories of the service. It was the beginning of the career of the *Constitution*, whose name is still the most illustrious on the American naval list and whose commanders, Hull and Bainbridge, are numbered among the great captains. It is a privilege to behold today, in the Boston Navy Yard, this gallant frigate preserved as a heritage, her tall masts and graceful yards soaring above the grim, gray citadels that we call battleships. True it is that a

single modern shell would destroy this obsolete, archaic frigate which once swept the seas like a meteor, but the very image of her is still potent to thrill the hearts and animate the courage of an American seaman.

On that luckless July morning, at break of day, off the New Jersey coast, it seemed as though the *Constitution* would be flying British colors ere she had a chance to fight. On her leeward side stood two English frigates, the *Guerrière* and the *Belvidera*, with the *Shannon* only five miles astern, and the rest of the hostile fleet lifting topsails above the southern horizon.

Not a breath of wind stirred. Captain Hull called away his boats, and the sailors tugged at the oars, towing the *Constitution* very slowly ahead. Captain Broke of the *Shannon* promptly followed suit and signaled for all the boats of the squadron. In a long column they trailed at the end of the hawser; and the *Shannon* crept closer. Catspaws of wind ruffled the water, and first one ship and then the other gained a few hundred yards as upper tiers of canvas caught the faint impulse. The *Shannon* was a crack ship, and there was no better crew in the British navy, as Lawrence of the *Chesapeake* afterwards learned to his mortal sorrow.

Gradually the *Shannon* cut down the intervening distance until she could make use of her bow guns.

At this Captain Hull resolved to try kedging his ship along, sending a boat half a mile ahead with a light anchor and all the spare rope on board. The crew walked the capstan round and hauled the ship up to the anchor, which they then lifted, carried ahead, and dropped again. The *Constitution* kept two kedges going all through that summer day, but the *Shannon* was playing the same game, and the two ships maintained their relative positions. They shot at each other at such long range that no damage was done. Before dusk the *Guerrière* caught a slant of breeze and worked nearer enough to bang away at the *Constitution*, which was, indeed, between the devil and the deep sea.

Night came on. The sailors, British and American, toiled until they dropped in their tracks, pulling at the kedge anchors and hawsers or bending to the sweeps of the cutters which towed at intervals and were exposed to the spatter of shot. It seemed impossible that the *Constitution* could slip clear of this pack of able frigates which trailed her like hounds. Toward midnight the fickle breeze awoke and wafted the ships along under studding sails and all the light cloths that were wont to

arch skyward. For two hours the men slept on deck like logs while those on watch grunted at the pump-brakes and the hose wetted the canvas to make it draw better.

The breeze failed, however, and through the rest of the night it was kedge and tow again, the *Shannon* and the *Guerrière* hanging on doggedly, confident of taking their quarry. Another day dawned, hot and windless, and the situation was unchanged. Other British ships had crawled or drifted nearer, but the *Constitution* was always just beyond range of their heavy guns. We may imagine Isaac Hull striding across the poop and back again, ruddy, solid, composed, wearing a cocked hat and a gold-laced coat, lifting an eye aloft, or squinting through his brass telescope, while he damned the enemy in the hearty language of the sea. He was a nephew of General William Hull, but it would have been unfair to remind him of it.

Near sunset of the second day of this unique test of seamanship and endurance, a rain squall swept toward the *Constitution* and obscured the ocean. Just before the violent gust struck the ship her seamen scampered aloft and took in the upper sails. This was all that safety required, but, seeing a

chance to trick the enemy, Hull ordered the lower sails double-reefed as though caught in a gale of wind. The British ships hastily imitated him before they should be overtaken in like manner and veered away from the chase. Veiled in the rain and dusk, the *Constitution* set all sail again and foamed at twelve knots on her course toward a port of refuge. Though two of the British frigates were in sight next morning, the *Constitution* left them far astern and reached Boston safely.

Seafaring New England was quick to recognize the merit of this escape. Even the Federalists, who opposed and hampered the war by land, were enthusiastic in praise of Captain Hull and his ship. They had outsailed and outwitted the best of the British men-of-war on the American coast, and a general feeling of hopelessness gave way to an ardent desire to try anew the ordeal of battle. With this spirit firing his officers and crew, Hull sailed again a few days later on a solitary cruise to the eastward with the intention of vexing the enemy's merchant trade and hopeful of finding a frigate willing to engage him in a duel. From Newfoundland he cruised south until a Salem privateer spoke him on the 18th of August and reported a British warship close by. The *Constitution* searched until



the afternoon of the next day and then sighted her old friend, the *Guerrière*.

To retell the story of their fight in all the vanished sea lingo of that day would bewilder the landman and prove tedious to those familiar with the subject. The boatswains piped the call, "all hands clear ship for action"; the fife and drum beat to quarters; and four hundred men stood by the tackles of the muzzle-loading guns with their clumsy wooden carriages, or climbed into the tops to use their muskets or trim sail. Decks were sanded to prevent slipping when blood flowed. Boys ran about stacking the sacks of powder or distributing buckets of pistols ready for the boarding parties. And against the masts the cutlasses and pikes stood ready.

Captain John Dacres of the ill-fated *Guerrière* was an English gentleman as well as a gallant officer. But he did not know his antagonist. Like his comrades of the service he had failed to grasp the fact that the *Constitution* and the other American frigates of her class were the most formidable craft afloat, barring ships of the line, and that they were to revolutionize the design of war-vessels for half a century thereafter. They were frigates, or cruisers, in that they carried guns on two decks,

but the main battery of long twenty-four-pound guns was an innovation, and the timbers and planking were stouter than had ever been built into ships of the kind. So stout, indeed, were the sides that shot rebounded from them more than once and thus gave the *Constitution* the affectionate nickname of "Old Ironsides."

Sublimely indifferent to these odds, Captain Dacres had already sent a challenge, with his compliments, to Commodore Rodgers of the United States frigate *President*, saying that he would be very happy to meet him or any other American frigate of equal force, off Sandy Hook, "for the purpose of having a few minutes' tête-à-tête." It was therefore with the utmost willingness that the *Constitution* and the *Guerrière* hoisted their battle ensigns and approached each other warily for an hour while they played at long bowls, as was the custom, each hoping to disable the other's spars or rigging and so gain the advantage of movement. Finding this sort of action inconclusive, however, Hull set more sail and ran down to argue it with broadsides, coolly biding his time, although Morris, his lieutenant, came running up again and again to beg him to begin firing. Men were being killed beside their guns as they stood ready to jerk the lock

strings. The two ships were abreast of each other and no more than a few yards apart before the *Constitution* returned the cannonade that thundered from every gun port of her adversary.

Within ten minutes the *Guerrière's* mizzenmast was knocked over the side and her hull was shattered by the accurate fire of the Yankee gunners, who were trained to shoot on the downward roll of their ship and so smash below the water line. Almost unhurt, the *Constitution* moved ahead and fearfully raked the enemy's deck before the ships fouled each other. They drifted apart before the boarders could undertake their bloody business, and then the remaining masts of the British frigate toppled overside and she was a helpless wreck. Seventy-nine of her crew were dead or wounded and the ship was sinking beneath their feet. Captain Isaac Hull could truthfully report: "In less than thirty minutes from the time we got alongside of the enemy she was left without a spar standing, and the hull cut to pieces in such a manner as to make it difficult to keep her above water."

Captain Dacres struck his flag, and the American sailors who went aboard found the guns dismounted, the dead and dying scattered amid a wild tangle of spars and rigging, and great holes

blown through the sides and decks. The *Constitution* had suffered such trifling injury that she was fit and ready for action a few hours later. Of her crew only seven men were killed and the same number hurt. She was the larger ship, and the odds in her favor were as ten to seven, reckoned in men and guns, for which reasons Captain Hull ought to have won. The significance of his victory was that at every point he had excelled a British frigate and had literally blown her out of the water. His crew had been together only five weeks and could fairly be called green while the *Guerrière*, although short-handed, had a complement of veteran tars. The British navy had never hesitated to engage hostile men-of-war of superior force and had usually beaten them. Of two hundred fights between single ships, against French, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Danish, and Dutch, the English had lost only five. The belief of Captain Dacres that he could beat the *Constitution* was therefore neither rash nor ill-founded.

The English captain had ten Americans in his crew, but he would not compel them to fight against their countrymen and sent them below, although he sorely needed every man who could haul at a gun-tackle or lay out on a yard. Wounded though

he was and heartbroken by the disaster, his chivalry was faultless, and he took pains to report: "I feel it my duty to state that the conduct of Captain Hull and his officers toward our men has been that of a brave and generous enemy, the greatest care being taken to prevent our men losing the smallest trifle and the greatest attention being paid to the wounded."

When the Englishman was climbing up the side of the *Constitution* as a prisoner, Isaac Hull ran to help him, exclaiming, "Give me your hand, Dacres. I know you are hurt." No wonder that these two captains became fast friends. It is because sea warfare abounds in such manly incidents as these that the modern naval code of Germany, as exemplified in the acts of her submarine commanders, was so peculiarly barbarous and repellent.

On board the *Guerrière* was Captain William B. Orne, of the Salem merchant brig *Betsy*, which had been taken as a prize. His story of the combat is not widely known and seems worth quoting in part:

At two P.M. we discovered a large sail to windward bearing about north from us. We soon made her out to be a frigate. She was steering off from the wind, with her head to the southwest, evidently with the intention of cutting us off as soon as possible. Signals



were soon made by the *Guerrière*, but as they were not answered the conclusion was, of course, that she was either a French or American frigate. Captain Dacres appeared anxious to ascertain her character and after looking at her for that purpose, handed me his spy-glass, requesting me to give him my opinion of the stranger. I soon saw from the peculiarity of her sails and from her general appearance that she was, without doubt, an American frigate, and communicated the same to Captain Dacres. He immediately replied that he thought she came down too boldly for an American, but soon after added, "The better he behaves, the more honor we shall gain by taking him."

When the strange frigate came down to within two or three miles' distance, he hauled upon the wind, took in all his light sails, reefed his topsails, and deliberately prepared for action. It was now about five o'clock in the afternoon when he filled away and ran down for the *Guerrière*. At this moment Captain Dacres politely said to me: "Captain Orne, as I suppose you do not wish to fight against your own countrymen, you are at liberty to go below the water-line." It was not long after this before I retired from the quarter-deck to the cock-pit; of course I saw no more of the action until the firing ceased, but I heard and felt much of its effects; for soon after I left the deck the firing commenced on board the *Guerrière*, and was kept up almost incessantly until about six o'clock when I heard a tremendous explosion from the opposing frigate. The effect of her shot seemed to make the *Guerrière* reel and tremble as though she had received the shock of an earthquake.

Immediately after this, I heard a tremendous crash



on deck and was told that the mizzen-mast was shot away. In a few moments afterward, the cock-pit was filled with wounded men. After the firing had ceased I went on deck and there beheld a scene which it would be difficult to describe: all the *Guerrière's* masts were shot away and, as she had no sails to steady her, she lay rolling like a log in the trough of the sea. Many of the men were employed in throwing the dead overboard. The decks had the appearance of a butcher's slaughter-house; the gun tackles were not made fast and several of the guns got loose and were surging from one side to the other.

Some of the petty officers and seamen, after the action, got liquor and were intoxicated; and what with the groans of the wounded, the noise and confusion of the enraged survivors of the ill-fated ship rendered the whole scene a perfect hell.

Setting the hulk of the *Guerrière* on fire, Captain Hull sailed for Boston with the captured crew. The tidings he bore were enough to amaze an American people which expected nothing of its navy, which allowed its merchant ships to rot at the wharves, and which regarded the operations of its armies with the gloomiest forebodings. New England went wild with joy over a victory so peculiarly its own. Captain Hull and his officers were paraded up State Street to a banquet at Faneuil Hall while cheering thousands lined the sidewalks. A few days earlier had come the news of the

surrender of Detroit, but the gloom was now dispelled. Americans could fight, after all. Popular toasts of the day were:

OUR INFANT NAVY—*We must nurture the young Hercules in his cradle, if we mean to profit by the labors of his manhood.*

THE VICTORY WE CELEBRATE—*An invaluable proof that we are able to defend our rights on the ocean.*

Handbills spread the news through the country, and artillery salutes proclaimed it from Carolina to the Wabash. Congress voted fifty thousand dollars as prize money to the heroes of the *Constitution* and medals to her officers. The people of New York gave them swords, and Captain Hull and Lieutenant Morris received pieces of plate from the patriots of Philadelphia. Federalists laid aside for the moment their opposition to the war and proclaimed that their party had founded and supported the navy. The moral effect of the victory was out of all proportion to its strategic importance. It was like sunshine breaking through a fog. Such rejoicing had been unknown, even in the decisive moments of the War of the Revolution. It served to show how deep-seated had been the American conviction that Britain's mastery of the sea was like a spell which could not be broken.

## CHAPTER VI

### MATCHLESS FRIGATES AND THEIR DUELS

It was soon made clear that the impressive victory over the *Guerrière* was neither a lucky accident nor the result of prowess peculiar to the *Constitution* and her crew. Ship for ship, the American navy was better than the British. This is a truth which was demonstrated with sensational emphasis by one engagement after another. During the first eight months of the war there were five such duels, and in every instance the enemy was compelled to strike his colors. In tavern and banquet hall revelers were still drinking the health of Captain Isaac Hull when the thrilling word came that the *Wasp*, an eighteen-gun ship or sloop, as the type was called in naval parlance, had beaten the *Frolic* in a rare fight. The antagonists were so evenly matched in every respect that there was no room for excuses, and on both sides were displayed such stubborn hardihood and a seamanship so dauntless

as to make an Anglo-Saxon proud that these foemen were bred of a common stock.

The *Wasp* had sailed from the Delaware on the 13th of October, heading southeast to look for British merchantmen in the West India track. Her commander was Captain Jacob Jones, a name revived in modern days by a destroyer of the Queenstown fleet in the arduous warfare against the German submarines. Shattered by a torpedo, the *Jacob Jones* sank in seven minutes, and sixty-four of the officers and crew perished, doing their duty to the last, disciplined, unafraid, so proving themselves worthy of the American naval service and of the memory of the unflinching captain of 1812.

The little *Wasp* ran into a terrific gale which blew her sails away and washed men overboard. But she made repairs and stood bravely after a British convoy which was escorted by the eighteen-gun brig *Frolic*, Captain Thomas Whinyates. The *Frolic*, too, had been battered by the weather, and the cargo ships had been scattered far and wide. The *Wasp* sighted several of them in the moonlight but, fearing they might be war vessels, followed warily until morning revealed on her leeward side the *Frolic*. Jacob Jones promptly shortened sail,

which was the nautical method of rolling up one's sleeves, and steered close to attack.

It seemed preposterous to try to fight while the seas were still monstrously swollen and their crests were breaking across the decks of these vessels of less than five hundred tons burden. Wildly they rolled and pitched, burying their bows in the roaring combers. The merchant ships which watched this audacious defiance of wind and wave were having all they could do to avoid being swept or dismasted. Side by side wallowed *Wasp* and *Frolic*, sixty yards between them, while the cannon rolled their muzzles under water and the gunners were blinded with spray. Britisher and Yank, each crew could hear the hearty cheers of the other as they watched the chance to ply rammer and sponge and fire when the deck lifted clear of the sea.

Somehow the *Wasp* managed to shoot straight and fast. They were of the true webfooted breed in this hard-driven sloop-of-war, but there were no fair-weather mariners aboard the *Frolic*, and they hit the target much too often for comfort. Within ten minutes they had saved Captain Jacob Jones the trouble of handling sail, for they shot away his upper masts and yards and most of his rigging. The *Wasp* was a wreck aloft but the *Frolic* had

suffered more vitally, for as usual the American gun captains aimed for the deck and hull; and they had been carefully drilled at target practice. The British sailors suffered frightfully from this storm of grape and chain shot, but those who were left alive still fought inflexibly. It looked as though the *Frolic* might get away, for the masts of the *Wasp* were in danger of tumbling over the side. With this mischance in mind, Captain Jacob Jones shifted helm and closed in for a hand-to-hand finish.

For a few minutes the two ships plunged ahead so near each other that the rammers of the American sailors struck the side of the *Frolic* as they drove the shot down the throats of their guns. It was literally muzzle to muzzle. Then they crashed together and the *Wasp's* jib-boom was thrust between the *Frolic's* masts. In this position the British decks were raked by a murderous fire as Jacob Jones trumpeted the order, "Boarders away!" Jack Lang, a sailor from New Jersey, scrambled out on the bowsprit, cutlass in his fist, without waiting to see if his comrades were with him, and dropped to the forecastle of the *Frolic*. Lieutenant Biddle tried it by jumping on the bulwark and climbing to the other ship as they crashed



together on the next heave of the sea, but a doughty midshipman, seeking a handy purchase, grabbed him by the coat tails and they fell back upon their own deck. Another attempt and Biddle joined Jack Lang by way of the bowsprit. These two thus captured the *Frolic*, for as they dashed aft the only living men on deck were the undaunted sailor at the wheel and three officers, including Captain Whinyates and Lieutenant Wintle, who were so severely wounded that they could not stand without support. They tottered forward and surrendered their swords, and Lieutenant Biddle then leaped into the rigging and hauled the British ensign down.

Of the *Frolic's* crew of one hundred and ten men only twenty were unhurt, and these had fled below to escape the dreadful fire from the *Wasp*. The gun deck was strewn with bodies, and the waves which broke over the ship swirled them to and fro, the dead and the wounded together. Not an officer had escaped death or injury. The *Wasp* was more or less of a tangle aloft but her hull was sound and only five of her men had been killed and five wounded. No sailors could have fought more bravely than Captain Whinyates and his British crew, but they had been overwhelmed in

three-quarters of an hour by greater skill, coolness, and judgment.

No sea battle of the war was more brilliant than this, but Captain Jacob Jones was delayed in sailing home to receive the plaudits due him. His prize crew was aboard the *Frolic*, cleaning up the horrid mess and fitting the beaten ship for the voyage to Charleston, and the *Wasp* was standing by when there loomed in sight a towering three-decker — a British ship of the line — the *Poictiers*. The *Wasp* shook out her sails to make a run for it, but they had been cut to ribbons and she was soon overhauled. Now an eighteen-gun ship could not argue with a majestic seventy-four. Captain Jacob Jones submitted with as much grace as he could muster, and *Wasp* and *Frolic* were carried to Bermuda. The American crew was soon exchanged, and Congress applied balm to the injured feelings of these fine sailormen by filling their pockets to the amount of twenty-five thousand dollars in prize money.

It was only a week later that the navy vouchsafed an encore to a delighted nation. This time the sport royal was played between stately frigates. On the 8th of October Commodore Rodgers had taken his squadron out of Boston for a second

cruise. After four days at sea the *United States* was detached, and Captain Stephen Decatur ranged off to the eastward in quest of diversion. A fortnight of monotony was ended by a strange sail which proved to be the British thirty-eight-gun frigate *Macedonian*, newly built. Her commander, Captain Carden, had the highest opinion of his ship and crew, and one of his officers testified that "the state of discipline on board was excellent; in no British ship was more attention paid to gunnery. Before this cruise the ship had been engaged almost every day with the enemy; and in time of peace the crew were constantly exercised at the great guns."

The *United States* was a sister frigate of the *Constitution*, built from the same designs and therefore more formidable than her British opponent as three is to two. Captain Carden had no misgivings, however, and instantly set out in chase of the American frigate. But he was unfortunate enough to pit himself against one of the ablest officers afloat, and his own talent was mediocre. The result was partly determined by this personal equation in an action in which the *Macedonian* was outgeneraled as well as outfought. And again gunnery was a decisive factor. Observers said that

the broadsides of the *United States* flamed with such rapidity that the ship looked as though she were on fire.

Early in the fight Captain Carden bungled an opportunity to pass close ahead of the *United States* and so rake her with a destructive attack. Then rashly coming to close quarters, the *Macedonian* was swept by the heavy guns of the American frigate and reduced to wreckage in ninety minutes. The weather was favorable for the Yankee gun crews, and the war offered no more dramatic proof of their superbly intelligent training. The *Macedonian* had received more than one hundred shot in her hull, several below the water line, one mast had been cut in two, and the others were useless. More than a hundred of her officers and men were dead or injured. The *United States* was almost undamaged, a few ropes and small spars were shot away, and only twelve of her men were on the casualty list. Captain Decatur rightfully boasted that he had as fine a crew as ever walked a deck, American sailors who had been schooled for the task with the greatest care. English opinion went so far as to concede this much: "As a display of courage the character of our service was nobly upheld, but we would be deceiving ourselves

were we to admit that the comparative expertness of the crews in gunnery was equally satisfactory. Now taking the difference of effect as given by Captain Carden, we must draw this conclusion — that the comparative loss in killed and wounded, together with the dreadful account he gives of the condition of his own ship, while he admits that the enemy's vessel was in comparatively good order, must have arisen from inferiority in gunnery as well as in force."

Decatur sent the *Macedonian* to Newport as a trophy of war and forwarded her battle flag to Washington. It arrived just when a great naval ball was in progress to celebrate the capture of the *Guerrière*, whose ensign was already displayed from the wall. It was a great moment for the young lieutenant of the *United States*, who had been assigned this duty, when he announced his mission and, amid the cheers of the President, the Cabinet, and other distinguished guests, proudly exhibited the flag of another British frigate to decorate the ballroom!

Meanwhile the *Constitution* had returned to sea to spread her royals to the South Atlantic trades and hunt for lumbering British East-Indiamen. Captain Isaac Hull had gracefully given up the

command in favor of Captain William Bainbridge, who was one of the oldest and most respected officers of his rank and who deserved an opportunity to win distinction. Bainbridge had behaved heroically at Tripoli and was logically in line to take over one of the crack frigates. The sailors of the *Constitution* grumbled a bit at losing Isaac Hull but soon regained their alert and willing spirit as they comprehended that they had another first-rate "old man" in William Bainbridge. Henry Adams has pointed out that the average age of Bainbridge, Hull, Rodgers, and Decatur was thirty-seven, while that of the four generals most conspicuous in the disappointments of the army, Dearborn, Wilkinson, William Hull, and Wade Hampton, was fifty-eight. The difference is notable and is mentioned for what it may be worth.

Through the autumn of 1812 the frigate cruised beneath tropic suns, much of the time off the coast of Brazil. Today the health and comfort of the bluejacket are so scrupulously provided for in every possible way that a battleship is the standard of perfection for efficiency in organization. It is amazing that in such a ship as the *Constitution* four hundred men could be cheerful and ready to fight after weeks and even months at sea. They



were crowded below the water line, without proper heat, plumbing, lighting, or ventilation, each man being allowed only twenty-eight inches by eight feet of space in which to sling his hammock against the beams overhead. Scurvy and other diseases were rampant. As many as seventy of the crew of the *Constitution* were on the sick list shortly before she fought the *Guerrière*. The food was wholesome for rugged men, but it was limited solely to salt beef, hard bread, dried peas, cheese, pork, and spirits.

Such conditions, however, had not destroyed the vigor of those hardy seamen of the *Constitution* when, on the 29th of December and within sight of the Brazilian coast, the lookout at the masthead sang out to Captain Bainbridge that a heavy ship was coming up under easy canvas. It turned out to be His Britannic Majesty's frigate *Java*, Captain Henry Lambert, who, like Carden, made the mistake of insisting upon a combat. His reasons were sounder than those of Dacres or Carden, however, for the *Java* was only a shade inferior to the *Constitution* in guns and carried as many men. In every respect they were so evenly matched that the test of battle could have no aftermath of extenuation.

The *Java* at once hastened in pursuit of the American ship which drew off the coast as though in flight, the real purpose being to get clear of the neutral Brazilian waters. The *Constitution* must have been a picture to stir the heart and kindle the imagination, her black hull heeling to the pressure of the tall canvas, the long rows of guns frowning from the open ports, while her bunting rippled a glorious defiance, with a commodore's pennant at the mainmast-head, the Stars and Stripes streaming from the mizzen peak and main-topgallant mast, and a Union Jack at the fore. The *Java* was adorned as bravely, and Captain Lambert had lashed an ensign in the rigging on the chance that his other colors might be shot away.

The two ships began the fray at what they called long range, which would be about a mile, and then swept onward to pass on opposite tacks. It was the favorite maneuver of trying to gain the weather gage, and while they were edging to windward a round shot smashed the wheel of the *Constitution* which so hampered her for the moment that Captain Lambert, handsomely taking advantage of the mishap, let the *Java* run past his enemy's stern and poured in a broadside which hit several of the American seamen. Both commanders

displayed, in a high degree, the art of handling ships under sail as they luffed or wore and tenaciously jockeyed for position, while the gunners fought in the smoke that drifted between the frigates.

At length Captain Lambert became convinced that he had met his master at this agile style of warfare and determined to come to close quarters before the *Java* was fatally damaged. Her masts and yards were crashing to the deck and the slaughter among the crew was already appalling. Marines and seamen gathered in the gangways and upon the forecastle head to spring aboard the *Constitution*, but Captain Bainbridge drove his ship clear very shortly after the collision and continued to pound the *Java* to kindling-wood with his broadsides. The fate of the action was no longer in doubt. The British frigate was on fire, Captain Lambert was mortally wounded, and all her guns had been silenced. The *Constitution* hauled off to repair damages and stood back an hour later to administer the final blow. But the flag of the *Java* fluttered down, and the lieutenant in command surrendered.

The *Constitution* had again crushed the enemy with so little damage to herself that she was ready to continue her cruise, with a loss of only nine

killed and twenty-five wounded. The *Java* was a fine ship utterly destroyed, a sinking, dismasted hulk, with a hundred and twenty-four of her men dead or suffering from wounds. It is significant to learn that during six weeks at sea they had fired but six practice broadsides, of blank cartridges, although there were many raw hands in the crew, while the men of the *Constitution* had been incessantly drilled in firing until their team play was like that of a football eleven. There was no shooting at random. Under Hull and Bainbridge they had been taught, their trade, which was to lay the gun on the target and shoot as rapidly as possible.

For the diminutive American navy, the year of 1812 came to its close with a record of success so illustrious as to seem almost incredible. It is more dignified to refrain from extolling our own exploits and to recall the effects of these sea duels upon the minds of the people, the statesmen, and the press of the England of that period. Their outbursts of wrathful humiliation were those of a maritime race which cared little or nothing about the course of the American war by land. Theirs was the salty tradition, virile and perpetual, which a century later and in a friendlier guise was to create a Grand Fleet which should keep watch and ward in the

misty Orkneys and hold the Seven Seas safe against the naval power of Imperial Germany. Then, as now, the English nation believed that its armed ships were its salvation.

It is easier to understand, bearing this in mind, why after the fight of the *Guerrière* the London *Times* indulged in such frenzied lamentations as these:

We witnessed the gloom which that event cast over high and honorable minds. . . . Never before in the history of the world did an English frigate strike to an American, and though we cannot say that Captain Dacres, under all circumstances, is punishable for this act, yet we do say there are commanders in the English navy who would a thousand times rather have gone down with their colors flying than to have set their fellow sailors so fatal an example.

Good God! that a few short months should have so altered the tone of British sentiments! Is it true, or is it not, that our navy was accustomed to hold the Americans in utter contempt? Is it true, or is it not, that the *Guerrière* sailed up and down the American coast with her name painted in large characters on her sails in boyish defiance of Commodore Rodgers? Would any captain, however young, have indulged such a foolish piece of vain-boasting if he had not been carried forward by the almost unanimous feeling of his associates?

We have since sent out more line-of-battle ships and heavier frigates. Surely we must now mean to smother the American navy. A very short time before the capture of the *Guerrière* an American frigate was an object of ridicule to our honest tars. Now the prejudice is actually setting the other way and great pains seems to be taken by the friends of ministers to prepare the public for the surrender of a British seventy-four to an opponent lately so much contemned.

It was when the news reached England that the *Java* had been destroyed by the *Constitution* that indignation found a climax in the outcry of the *Pilot*, a foremost naval authority:

The public will learn, with sentiments which we shall not presume to anticipate, that a third British frigate has struck to an American. This is an occurrence that calls for serious reflection, — this, and the fact stated in our paper of yesterday, that Lloyd's list contains notices of upwards of five hundred British vessels captured in seven months by the Americans. Five hundred merchantmen and three frigates! Can these statements be true; and can the English people hear them unmoved? Any one who would have predicted such a result of an American war this time last year would have been treated as a madman or a traitor. He would have been told, if his opponents had condescended to argue with him, that long ere seven months had elapsed the American flag would have been swept from the seas, the contemptible navy of the United States annihilated, and their maritime



arsenals rendered a heap of ruins. Yet down to this moment not a single American frigate has struck her flag. They insult and laugh at our want of enterprise and vigor. They leave their ports when they please and return to them when it suits their convenience; they traverse the Atlantic; they beset the West India Islands; they advance to the very chops of the Channel; they parade along the coasts of South America; nothing chases, nothing intercepts, nothing engages them but to yield them triumph.

It was to be taken for granted that England would do something more than scold about the audacity of the American navy. Even after the declaration of war her most influential men hoped that the repeal of the obnoxious Orders-in-Council might yet avert a solution of the American problem by means of the sword. There was hesitation to apply the utmost military and naval pressure, and New England was regarded with feelings almost friendly because of its opposition to an offensive warfare against Great Britain and an invasion of Canada.

Absorbed in the greater issue against Napoleon, England was nevertheless aroused to more vigorous action against the United States and devised strong blockading measures for the spring of 1813. Unable to operate against the enemy's ships in force

or to escape from ports which were sealed by vigilant squadrons, the American navy to a large extent was condemned to inactivity for the remainder of the war. Occasional actions were fought and merit was justly won, but there was nothing like the glory of 1812, which shone undimmed by defeat and which gave to the annals of the nation one of its great chapters of heroic and masterful achievement. It was singularly apt that the noble and victorious American frigates should have been called the *Constitution* and the *United States*. They inspired a new respect for the flag with the stripes and the stars and for all that it symbolized.

## CHAPTER VII

“DON'T GIVE UP THE SHIP!”

THE second year of the war by sea opened brilliantly enough to satisfy the American people, who were now in a mood to expect too much of their navy. In February the story of the *Wasp* and the *Frolic* was repeated by two ships of precisely the same class. The American sloop-of-war *Hornet* had sailed to South America with the *Constitution* and was detached to blockade, in the port of Bahia, the British naval sloop *Bonne Citoyenne*, which contained treasure to the amount of half a million pounds in specie. Captain James Lawrence of the *Hornet* sent in a challenge to fight, ship against ship, pledging his word that the *Constitution* would not interfere, but the British commander, perhaps mindful of his precious cargo, declined the invitation. Instead of this, he sensibly sent word to a great seventy-four at Rio de Janeiro, begging her to come and drive the pestiferous *Hornet* away.

The British battleship arrived so suddenly that Captain Lawrence was compelled to dodge and flee in the darkness. By a close shave he gained the open sea and made off up the coast. For several weeks the *Hornet* idled to and fro, vainly seeking merchant prizes, and then off the Demerara River on February 24, 1813, she fell in with the British brig *Peacock*, that flew the royal ensign. The affair lasted no more than fifteen minutes. The *Peacock* was famous for shining brass work, spotless paint, and the immaculate trimness of a yacht, but her gunnery had been neglected, for which reason she went to the bottom in six fathoms of water with shot-holes in her hull and thirty-seven of her crew put out of action. The sting of the *Hornet* had been prompt and fatal. Captain Lawrence had only one man killed and two wounded, and his ship was as good as ever. Crowding his prisoners on board and being short of provisions and water, he set sail for a home port and anchored in New York harbor. He was in time to share with Bainbridge the carnival of salutes, processions, dinners, addresses of congratulation, votes of thanks, swords, medals, prize money, promotion — every possible tribute of an adoring and grateful people.

One of the awards bestowed upon Lawrence was

the command of the frigate *Chesapeake*. Among seamen she was rated an unlucky ship, and Lawrence was confidently expected to break the spell. Her old crew had left her after the latest voyage, which met with no success, and other sailors were reluctant to join her. Privateering had attracted many of them, and the navy was finding it difficult to recruit the kind of men it desired. Lawrence was compelled to sign on a scratch lot, some Portuguese, a few British, and many landlubbers. Given time to shake them together in hard service at sea, he would have made a smart crew of them no doubt, as Isaac Hull had done in five weeks with the men of the *Constitution*, but destiny ordered otherwise.

In the spring of 1813 the harbor of Boston was blockaded by the thirty-eight-gun British frigate *Shannon*, Captain Philip Vere Broke, who had been in this ship for seven years. In the opinion of Captain Mahan, "his was one of those cases where singular merit as an officer and an attention to duty altogether exceptional had not yet obtained opportunity for distinction. It would probably be safe to say that no more thoroughly efficient ship of her class had been seen in the British navy during the twenty years' war with France."

Captain Broke was justly confident in his own

leadership and in the efficiency of a ship's company, which had retained its identity of organization through so many years of his personal and energetic supervision. Indeed, the captain of the British flagship on the American station wrote: “The *Shannon's* men were trained and understood gunnery better than any men I ever saw.” Every morning the men were exercised at training the guns and in the afternoon in the use of the broadsword, musket, and pike. Twice each week the crew fired at targets with great guns and musketry and the sailor who hit the bull's eye received a pound of tobacco. Without warning Captain Broke would order a cask tossed overboard and then suddenly order some particular gun to sink it. In brief, the *Shannon* possessed those qualities which had been notable in the victorious American frigates and which were lamentably deficient in the *Chesapeake*.

Lawrence's men were unknown to each other and to their officers, and they had never been to sea together. The last draft came aboard, in fact, just as the anchor was weighed and the *Chesapeake* stood out to meet her doom. Even most of her officers were new to the ship. They had no chance whatever to train or handle the rabble between



decks. Now Captain Broke had been anxious to fight this American frigate as matching the *Shannon* in size and power. He had already addressed to Captain Lawrence a challenge whose wording was a model of courtesy but which was provocative to the last degree. A sailor of Lawrence's heroic temper was unlikely to avoid such a combat, stimulated as he was by the unbroken success of his own navy in duels between frigates.

On the first day of June, Captain Broke boldly ran into Boston harbor and broke out his flag in defiance of the *Chesapeake* which was riding at anchor as though waiting to go to sea. Instantly accepting the invitation, Captain Lawrence hoisted colors, fired a gun, and mustered his crew. In this ceremonious fashion, as gentlemen were wont to meet with pistols to dispute some point of honor, did the *Chesapeake* sail out to fight the waiting *Shannon*. The news spread fast and wide and thousands of people, as though they were bound to the theater, hastened to the heights of Malden, to Nahant, and to the headlands of Salem and Marblehead, in hopes of witnessing this famous sight. They assumed that victory was inevitable. Any other surmise was preposterous.

These eager crowds were cheated of the spectacle,

however, for the *Chesapeake* bore away to the eastward after rounding Boston Light and dropped hull down until her sails were lost in the summer haze, with the *Shannon* in her company as if they steered for some rendezvous. They were firing when last seen and the wind bore the echo of the guns, faint and far away. It was most extraordinary that three weeks passed before the people would believe the tidings of the disaster. A pilot who had left the *Chesapeake* at five o’clock in the afternoon reported that he was still near enough an hour later to see the two ships locked side by side, that a fearful explosion had happened aboard the *Chesapeake*, and that through a rift in the battle smoke he had beheld the British flag flying above the American frigate.

This report was confirmed by a fishing boat from Cape Ann and by the passengers in a coastwise packet, but the public doubted and still hoped until the newspapers came from Halifax with an account of the arrival of the *Chesapeake* as prize to the *Shannon* and of the funeral honors paid to the body of Captain James Lawrence. The tragic defeat came at an extremely dark moment of the war when almost every expectation had been disappointed and the future was clouded. Richard

Rush, the American diplomatist, wrote, recalling the event:

I remember — what American does not! — the first rumor of it. I remember the startling sensation. I remember at first the universal incredulity. I remember how the post-offices were thronged for successive days by anxious thousands; how collections of citizens rode out for miles on the highway, accosting the mail to catch something by anticipation. At last, when the certainty was known, I remember the public gloom; funeral orations and badges of mourning bespoke it. “Don’t give up the ship” — the dying words of Lawrence — were on every tongue.

It was learned that the *Chesapeake* had followed the *Shannon* until five o’clock, when the latter luffed and showed her readiness to begin fighting. Lawrence was given the choice of position, with a westerly breeze, but he threw away this advantage, preferring to trust to his guns with a green crew rather than the complex and delicate business of maneuvering his ship under sail. He came bowling straight down at the *Shannon*, luffed in his turn, and engaged her at a distance of fifty yards. The breeze was strong and the nimble American frigate forged ahead more rapidly than Lawrence expected, so that presently her broadside guns had ceased to bear.

While Lawrence was trying to slacken headway and regain the desired position, the enemy's shot disabled his headsails, and the *Chesapeake* came up into the wind with canvas all a-flutter. It was a mishap which a crew of trained seamen might have quickly mended, but the frigate was taken aback — that is, the breeze drove her stern foremost toward the *Shannon* and exposed her to a deadly cannonade which the American gunners were unable to return. The hope of salvation lay in getting the ship under way again or in boarding the *Shannon*. It was in this moment that the battle was won and lost, for every gun of the British broadside was sweeping the American deck diagonally from stern to bow, while the marines in the tops of the *Shannon* picked off the officers and seamen of the *Chesapeake*, riddling them with musket balls. It was like the swift blast of a hurricane. Lawrence fell, mortally wounded. Ludlow, his first lieutenant, was carried below. The second lieutenant was stationed between decks, and the third forsook his post to assist those who were carrying Lawrence below to the gun deck. Not an officer remained on the spar deck and not a living man was left on the quarter deck when the *Chesapeake* drifted against the *Shannon* after four minutes

of this infernal destruction. As the ships collided, Captain Broke dashed forward and shouted for boarders, leading them across to the American deck. No more than fifty men followed him and three hundred Yankee sailors should have been able to wipe the party out, but most of the *Chesapeake* crew were below, and, demoralized by lack of discipline and leadership, they refused to come up and stand the gaff. Brave resistance was made by the few who remained on deck and a dozen more followed the second lieutenant, George Budd, as he rushed up to rally a forlorn hope.

It was a desperate encounter while it lasted, and Captain Broke was slashed by a saber as he led a charge to clear the forecastle. Yet two minutes sufficed to clear the decks of the *Chesapeake*, and the few visible survivors were thrown down the hatchways. The guns ceased firing, and the crew below sent up a message of surrender. The frigates had drifted apart, leaving Broke and his seamen to fight without reinforcement, but before they came together again the day was won. This was the most humiliating phase of the episode, that a handful of British sailors and marines should have carried an American frigate by boarding.

It must not be inferred that the *Chesapeake*



inflicted no damage during the fifteen minutes of this famous engagement. Thirty-seven of the British boarding party were killed or wounded and the American marines — “leather-necks” then and “devil-dogs” now — fought in accordance with the spirit of a corps which had won its first laurels in the Revolution. Such broadsides as the *Chesapeake* was able to deliver were accurately placed and inflicted heavy losses. The victory cost the *Shannon* eighty-two men killed and wounded, while the American frigate lost one hundred and forty-seven of her crew, or more than one-third of her complement. Even in defeat the *Chesapeake* had punished the enemy far more severely than the *Constitution* had been able to do.

Lawrence lay in the cockpit, or hospital, when his men began to swarm down in confusion and leaderless panic. Still conscious, he was aware that disaster had overtaken them and he muttered again and again with his dying breath, “Don’t give up the ship. Blow her up.” Thus passed to an honorable fame an American naval officer of great gallantry and personal charm. Although he brought upon his country a bitter humiliation, the fact that he died sword in hand, his last thought for his flag and his service, has atoned for his faults



of rashness and overconfidence. The odds were against him, and ill-luck smashed his chance of overcoming them. He was no more disgraced than Dacres when he surrendered the *Guerrière* to a heavier ship, or than Lambert, dying on his own deck, when he saw the colors of the *Java* hauled down.

The *Shannon* took her prize to Halifax, and when the news came back that the captain of the *Chesapeake* lay dead in a British port, the bronzed seadogs of the Salem Marine Society resolved to fetch his body home in a manner befitting his end. Captain George Crowninshield obtained permission from the Government to sail with a flag of truce for Halifax, and he equipped the brig *Henry* for the sad and solemn mission. Her crew was picked from among the shipmasters of Salem, some of them privateering skippers, every man of them a proven deep-water commander. It was such a crew as never before or since took a vessel out of an American port. When they returned to Salem with the remains of Captain Lawrence and Lieutenant Ludlow, the storied old seaport saw their funeral column pass through the quiet and crowded streets. The pall-bearers bore names to thrill American hearts today — Hull, Stewart, Bain-

bridge, Blakely, Creighton, and Parker, all captains of the navy. A Salem newspaper described the ceremonies simply and with an unconscious pathos:

The day was unclouded, as if no incident should be wanting to crown the mind with melancholy and woe — the wind from the same direction and the sea presented the same unruffled surface as was exhibited to our anxious view when on that memorable first day of July we saw the immortal Lawrence proudly conducting his ship to action. . . . The brig *Henry* containing the precious relics lay at anchor in the harbor. They were placed in barges and, preceded by a long procession of boats filled with seamen uniformed in blue jackets and trousers, with a blue ribbon on their hats bearing the motto of “Free Trade and Sailors’ Rights,” were rowed by minute strokes to the end of India Wharf, where the bearers were ready to receive the honored dead. From the time the boats left the brig until the bodies were landed, the United States brig *Rattlesnake* and the brig *Henry* alternately fired minute guns. . . . On arriving at the meeting-house the coffins were placed in the centre of the church by the seamen who rowed them ashore and who stood during the ceremony leaning upon them in an attitude of mourning. The church was decorated with cypress and evergreen, and the names of Lawrence and Ludlow appeared in gilded letters on the front of the pulpit.

It was wholly reasonable that the exploit of the *Shannon* should arouse fervid enthusiasm in the

breast of every Briton. The wounds inflicted by Hull, Decatur, and Bainbridge still rankled, but they were now forgotten and the loud British boastings equaled all the tales of Yankee brag. A member of Parliament declared that the "action which Broke fought with the *Chesapeake* was in every respect unexampled. It was not — and he knew it was a bold assertion which he made — to be surpassed by any other engagement which graced the naval annals of Great Britain." Admiral Warren was still in a peevish humor at the hard knocks inflicted on the Royal Navy when he wrote, in congratulating Captain Broke: "At this critical moment you could not have restored to the British naval service the preëminence it has always preserved, or contradicted in a more forcible manner the foul aspersions and calumnies of a conceited, boasting enemy than by the brilliant act you have performed. The relation of such an event restores the history of ancient times and will do more good to the service than it is possible to conceive."

Captain Broke was made a baronet and received other honors and awards which he handsomely deserved, but the wound he had suffered at the head of his boarding party disabled him for further

sea duty. If the influence of the *Constitution* and the *United States* was far-reaching in improving the efficiency of the American navy, it can be said also that the victory of the *Shannon* taught the British service the value of rigorous attention to gunnery and a highly trained and disciplined personnel.

American chagrin was somewhat softened a few weeks later when two very small ships, the *Enterprise* and the *Boxer*, met in a spirited combat off the harbor of Portland, Maine, like two bantam cocks, and the Britisher was beaten in short order on September 5, 1813. The *Enterprise* had been a Yankee schooner in the war with Tripoli but had been subsequently altered to a square rig and had received more guns and men to worry the enemy's privateers. The brig-of-war was a kind of vessel heartily disliked by seamen and now vanished from blue water. The immortal Boatswain Chucks of Marryat proclaimed that "they would certainly damn their inventor to all eternity" and that "their common, low names, 'Pincher,' 'Thrasher,' 'Boxer,' 'Badger,' and all that sort, are quite good enough for them."

Commanding the *Enterprise* was Captain William Burrows, twenty-eight years old, who had seen only a month of active service in the war.

Captain Samuel Blyth of the *Boxer* had worked his way up to this unimportant post after many years of arduous duty in the British navy. He might have declined a tussel with the *Enterprise* for his crew numbered only sixty-six men against a hundred and twenty, but he nailed his colors to the mainmast and remarked that they would never come down while there was any life in him.

The day was calm, the breeze fitful, and the little brigs drifted about each other until they lay within pistol shot. Then both loosed their broadsides, while the sailors shouted bravely, and both captains fell, Blyth killed instantly and Burrows mortally hurt but crying out that the flag must never be struck. There was no danger of this, for the *Enterprise* raked the British brig through and through until resistance was hopeless. Captain Blyth was as good as his word. He did not live to see his ensign torn down. Great hearts in little ships, these two captains were buried side by side in a churchyard which overlooks Casco Bay, and there you may read their epitaphs today.

The grim force of circumstances was beginning to alter the naval policy of the United States. Notwithstanding the dramatic successes, her flag was almost banished from the high seas by the close of



the year 1813. The frigates *Constellation*, *United States*, and *Macedonian* were hemmed in port by the British blockade; the *Adams* and the *Constitution* were laid up for repairs; and the only formidable ships of war which roamed at large were the *President*, the *Essex*, and the *Congress*. The smaller vessels which had managed to slip seaward and which were of such immense value in destroying British commerce found that the system of convoying merchantmen in fleets of one hundred or two hundred sail had left the ocean almost bare of prizes. It was the habit of these convoys, however, to scatter as they neared their home ports, every skipper cracking on sail and the devil take the hindmost — a failing which has survived unto this day, and many a wrathful officer of an American cruiser or destroyer in the war against Germany could heartily echo the complaint of Nelson when he was a captain, "behaving as all convoys that ever I saw did, shamefully ill, and parting company every day."

This was the reason why American naval vessels and privateers left their own coasts and dared to rove in the English Channel, as Paul Jones had done in the *Ranger* a generation earlier. It was discovered that enemy merchantmen could be



snapped up more easily within sight of their own shores than thousands of miles away. First to emphasize this fact in the War of 1812 was the naval brig *Argus*, Captain William H. Allen, which made a summer crossing and cruised for a month on end in the Irish Sea and in the chops of the Channel with a gorgeous recompense for her shameless audacity. England scolded herself red in the face while the saucy *Argus* captured twenty-seven ships and took her pick of their valuable cargoes. Her course could be traced by the blazing hulls that she left in her wake and this was how the British gun brig *Pelican* finally caught up with her.

Although the advantage of size and armament was with the *Pelican*, it was to be expected that the *Argus* would prove more than a match for her. The American commander, Captain Allen, had played a distinguished part in several of the most famous episodes of the navy. As third lieutenant of the *Chesapeake*, in 1807, he had picked up a live coal in the cook's galley, held it in his fingers, and so fired the only gun discharged against the *Leopard* in that inglorious surprise and surrender. As first officer of the frigate *United States* he received credit for the splendid gunnery which had overwhelmed the *Macedonian*, and he enjoyed the glory of bringing

the prize to port. It was as a reward of merit that he was given command of the *Argus*. Alas, in this fight off the coast of Wales he lost both his ship and his life, and England had scored again. There was no ill-luck this time — nothing to plead in excuse. The American brig threw away a chance of victory because her shooting was amazingly bad, and instead of defending the deck with pistol, pike, and musket, when the boarders came over the bow the crew lowered the flag.

It was an early morning fight, on August 14, 1813, in which Captain Allen had his leg shot off within five minutes after the two brigs had engaged. He refused to be taken below, but loss of blood soon made him incapable of command, and presently his first lieutenant was stunned by a grapeshot which grazed his scalp. The ship was well sailed, however, and gained a position for raking the *Pelican* in deadly fashion, but the shot went wild and scarcely any harm was done. The British captain chose his own range and methodically made a wreck of the *Argus* in twenty minutes of smashing fire, working around her at will while not a gun returned his broadsides. Then he sheered close and was prepared to finish it on the deck of the *Argus* when she surrendered with twenty-three

of her crew out of action. The *Pelican* was so little punished that only two men were killed. The officer left in command of the *Argus* laid this unhappy conclusion to "the superior size and metal of our opponent, and the fatigue which the crew underwent from a very rapid succession of prizes." There were those on board who blamed it to the casks of Oporto wine which had been taken out of the latest prize and which the sailors had secretly tapped. Honesty is the best policy, even in dealing with an enemy. The affair of the *Argus* and the *Pelican* was not calculated to inflate Yankee pride.

To balance this, however, came two brilliant actions by small ships. The new *Peacock*, named for the captured British brig, under Captain Lewis Warrington, stole past the blockade of New York. Off the Florida coast on the 29th of April she sighted a convoy and attacked the escort brig of eighteen guns, the *Epervier*. In this instance the behavior of the American vessel and her crew was supremely excellent and not a flaw could be found. They hulled the British brig forty-five times and made a shambles of her deck and did it with the loss of one man.

Even more sensational was the last cruise of the *Wasp*, Captain Johnston Blakely, which sailed

from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in May and roamed the English Channel to the dismay of all honest British merchantmen. The brig-of-war *Reindeer* endeavored to put an end to her career but nineteen minutes sufficed to finish an action in which the *Wasp* slaughtered half the British crew and thrice repelled boarders. This was no light task, for as Michael Scott, the British author of *Tom Cringle's Log*, candidly expressed it:

In the field, or grappling in mortal combat on the blood-slippery deck of an enemy's vessel, a British soldier or sailor is the bravest of the brave. No soldier or sailor of any other country, saving and excepting those damned Yankees, can stand against them. . . . I don't like Americans. I never did and never shall like them. I have no wish to eat with them, drink with them, deal with or consort with them in any way; but let me tell the whole truth, — *nor fight* with them, were it not for the laurel to be acquired by overcoming an enemy so brave, determined, and alert, and every way so worthy of one's steel as they have always proved.

Refitting in a French port, the dashing Blakely took the *Wasp* to sea again and encountered a convoy in charge of a huge, lumbering ship of the line. Nothing daunted, the *Wasp* flitted in among the timid merchant ships and snatched a valuable prize

laden with guns and military stores. Attempting to bag another, she was chased away by the indignant seventy-four and winged it in search of other quarry until she sighted four strange sails. Three of them were British war brigs in hot pursuit of a Yankee privateer, and Johnston Blakely was delighted to play a hand in the game. He selected his opponent, which happened to be the *Avon*, and overtook her in the darkness of evening. Before a strong wind they foamed side by side, while the guns flashed crimson beneath the shadowy gleam of tall canvas. Thus they ran for an hour and a half, and then the *Avon* signaled that she was beaten, with five guns dismounted, forty-two men dead or wounded, seven feet of water in the hold, the magazine flooded, and the spars and rigging almost destroyed.

Blakely was about to send a crew aboard when another hostile brig, forsaking the agile Yankee privateer, came up to help the *Avon*. The *Wasp* was perfectly willing to take on this second adversary, but just then a third British ship loomed through the obscurity, and the ocean seemed a trifle overpopulated for safety. Blakely ran off before the wind, compelled to abandon his prize. The *Avon*, however, was so badly battered that she



went to the bottom before the wounded seamen could be removed from her. Thence the *Wasp* went to Madeira and was later reported as spoken near the Cape Verde Islands, but after that she vanished from blue water, erased by some tragic fate whose mystery was never solved. To the port of missing ships she carried brave Blakely and his men after a meteoric career which had swept her from one victory to another.

Of the frigates, only three saw action during the last two years of the war, and of these the *President* and the *Essex* were compelled to strike to superior forces of the enemy. The *Constitution* was lucky enough to gain the open sea in December, 1814, and fought her farewell battle with the frigate *Cyane* and the sloop-of-war *Levant* on the 20th of February. In this fight Captain Charles Stewart showed himself a gallant successor to Hull and Bainbridge. Together the two British ships were stronger than the *Constitution*, but Stewart cleverly hammered the one and then the other and captured both. Honor was also due the plucky little *Levant*, which, instead of taking to her heels, stood by to assist her larger comrade like a terrier at the throat of a wolf. It is interesting to note that the captains, English and American, had received word that peace had



been declared, but without official confirmation they preferred to ignore it. The spirit which lent to naval warfare the spirit of the duel was too strong to let the opportunity pass.

The *President* was a victim of a continually increased naval strength by means of which Great Britain was able to strangle the seafaring trade and commerce of the United States as the war drew toward its close. Captain Decatur, who had taken command of this frigate, remarked "the great apprehension and danger" which New York felt, in common with the entire seaboard, and the anxiety of the city government that the crew of the ship should remain for defense of the port. Coast-wise navigation was almost wholly suspended, and thousands of sloops and schooners feared to undertake voyages to Philadelphia, Baltimore, or Charleston. Instead of these, canvas-covered wagons struggled over the poor highways in continuous streams between New England and the Southern coast towns. This awkward result of the blockade moved the sense of humor of the Yankee rhymsters who placarded the wagons with such mottoes as "Free Trade and Oxen's Rights" and parodied *Ye Mariners of England* with the lines:

Ye wagoners of Freedom  
 Whose chargers chew the cud,  
 Whose wheels have braved a dozen years  
 The gravel and the mud;  
 Your glorious hawbucks yoke again  
 To take another jag,  
 And scud through the mud  
 Where the heavy wheels do drag,  
 Where the wagon creak is long and low  
 And the jaded oxen lag.

Columbia needs no wooden walls,  
 No ships where billows swell;  
 Her march is like a terrapin's,  
 Her home is in her shell.  
 To guard her trade and sailor's rights,  
 In woods she spreads her flag.

Such ribald nonsense, however, was unfair to a navy which had done magnificently well until smothered and suppressed by sheer weight of numbers. It was in January, 1815, that Captain Decatur finally sailed out of New York harbor in the hope of taking the *President* past the blockading division which had been driven offshore by a heavy north-east gale. The British ships were struggling back to their stations when they spied the Yankee frigate off the southern coast of Long Island. It was a stern chase, Decatur with a hostile squadron at his heels and unable to turn and fight because

the odds were hopeless. The frigate *Endymion* was faster than her consorts and, as she came up alone, the *President* delayed to exchange broadsides before fleeing again with every sail set. Her speed had been impaired by stranding as she came out past Sandy Hook, else she might have outfooted the enemy. But soon the *Pomone* and the *Tenedos*, frigates of the class of the *Shannon* and the *Guerrière*, were in the hunt. Decatur was cornered, but his guns were served until a fifth of the crew were disabled, the ship was crippled, and a force fourfold greater than his own was closing in to annihilate him at its leisure. "I deemed it my duty to surrender," said he, and a noble American frigate, more formidable than the *Constitution*, was added to the list of the Royal Navy.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE LAST CRUISE OF THE ESSEX

THE last cruise of the *Essex* frigate, although an ill-fated one, makes a story far less mournful than that of the *President*. She was the first man-of-war to display the American flag in the wide waters of the Pacific. Her long and venturesome voyage is still regarded as one of the finest achievements of the navy, and it made secure the fame of Captain David Porter. The *Essex* has a peculiar right to be held in affectionate memory, apart from the very gallant manner of her ending, because into her very timbers were builded the faith and patriotism of the people of the New England seaport which had framed and launched her as a loan to the nation in an earlier time of stress.

At the end of the eighteenth century France had been the maritime enemy more hotly detested than England, and unofficial war existed with the "Terrible Republic." This situation was foreshadowed

as early as 1798 by James McHenry, Secretary of War, when he indignantly announced to Congress: "To forbear under such circumstances from taking naval and military measures to secure our trade, defend our territories in case of invasion, and to prevent or suppress domestic insurrection would be to offer up the United States a certain prey to France and exhibit to the world a sad spectacle of national degradation and imbecility."

Congress thereupon resolved to build two dozen ships which should teach France to mend her manners on the high seas, but the Treasury was too poor to pay the million dollars which this modest navy was to cost. Subscription lists were therefore opened in several shipping towns, and private capital advanced the funds to put the needed frigates afloat. The *Essex* was promptly contributed by Salem, and the advertisement of the master builder is brave and resonant reading:

To Sons of Freedom! All true lovers of Liberty of your Country! Step forth and give your assistance in building the frigate to oppose French insolence and piracy. Let every man in possession of a white oak tree be ambitious to be foremost in hurrying down the timber to Salem where the noble structure is to be fabricated to maintain your rights upon the seas and make the name of America respected among the

nations of the world. Your largest and longest trees are wanted, and the arms of them for knees and rising timber. Four trees are wanted for the keel which altogether will measure 146 feet in length and hew sixteen inches square.

The story of the building of the *Essex* is that of an aroused and reliant people. The great timbers were cut in the wood lots of the towns near by and were hauled through the snowy streets of Salem on ox-sleds while the people cheered them as they passed. The *Essex* was a Salem ship from keel to truck. Her cordage was made in three ropewalks. Captain Jonathan Haraden, the most famous Salem privateersman of the Revolution, made the rigging for the mainmast in his loft. The sails were cut from duck woven for the purpose in the mill on Broad Street and the ironwork was forged by Salem shipsmiths. When the huge hempen cables were ready to be conveyed to the frigate, the workmen hoisted them upon their shoulders and in procession marched to the music of fife and drum. In 1799, six months after the oak timbers had been standing trees, the *Essex* slid from the stocks into the harbor of old Salem. She was the handsomest and fastest American frigate of her day and when turned over to the Government, she cost what seemed at



that day the very considerable amount of seventy-five thousand dollars.

Peace was patched up with France, however, and the *Essex* was compelled to pursue more humdrum paths, now in the Indian Ocean and again with the Mediterranean squadron, until war with England began in 1812. It was intended that Captain Porter should rendezvous with the *Constitution* and the *Hornet* in South American waters for a well-planned cruise against British commerce, but other engagements detained Bainbridge, notably his encounter with the *Java*, and so they missed each other by a thousand miles or so. Since he had no means of communication, it was characteristic of Porter to conclude to strike out for himself instead of wandering about in an uncertain search for his friends.

Porter conceived the bold plan of rounding the Horn and playing havoc with the British whaling fleet. This adventure would take him ten thousand miles from the nearest American port, but he reckoned that he could capture provisions enough to feed his crew and supplies to refit the ship. As a raid there was nothing to match this cruise until the *Alabama* ran amuck among the Yankee clippers and whaling barks half a century later. It was

the wrong time of year to brave the foul weather of Cape Horn, however, and the *Essex* was battered and swept by one furious gale after another. But at last she won through, stout ship that she was, and her weary sailors found brief respite in the harbor of Valparaiso on March 14, 1813. Thence Porter headed up the coast, disguising the trim frigate so that she looked like a lubberly, high-pooped Spanish merchantman.

The luck of the navy was with the American captain for, as he went poking about the Galapagos Islands, he surprised three fine, large British whaling ships, all carrying guns and too useful to destroy. To one of them, the *Georgiana*, he shifted more guns, put a crew of forty men aboard under Lieutenant John Downes, ran up the American flag, and commissioned his prize as a cruiser. The other two he also manned — and now behold him, if you please, sailing the Pacific with a squadron of four good ships! Soon he ran down and captured two British letter-of-marque vessels, well armed and in fighting trim, and in a trice he had not a squadron but a fleet under his command, seven ships in all, mounting eighty guns and carrying three hundred and forty men and eighty prisoners. Two of these prizes he discovered to be crammed

to the hatches with cordage, paint, tar, canvas, and fresh provisions. The list could not have been more acceptable if Captain David Porter himself had signed the requisition in the New York Navy Yard.

Lieutenant Downes was now sent off cruising by himself, and so well did he profit by his captain's example and precepts that in a little while he had bagged a squadron of his own, three ships with twenty-seven guns and seventy-five men. When he rejoined the flagship in a harbor of the mainland, Porter rewarded him by calling his cruiser the *Essex, Junior*, promoting him to the rank of commander, and increasing his armament. They then resumed cruising in two squadrons, finding more British ships and sending them into the neutral harbor of Valparaiso or home to the United States with precious cargoes of whale oil and bone. Within a few months he swept the Southern Pacific almost clean of British merchantmen, whalers, and privateers. Winter coming on, Porter then sailed to the pleasant Marquesas Islands and laid the *Essex* up for a thorough overhauling. The enemy had furnished all needful supplies and even the money to pay the wages of the officers and crew.

Fit for sea again, the *Essex* and the *Essex, Junior*,

betook themselves to Valparaiso where they received information that the thirty-six-gun frigate *Phæbe* of the British navy was earnestly looking for them. She had been sent out from England to proceed to the northwest American coast and destroy the fur station at the mouth of the Columbia River. At Rio de Janeiro Captain Hillyar had heard reports of the ravages of the *Essex* and he considered it his business to hunt down this defiant Yankee. To make sure of success, he took the sloop-of-war *Cherub* along with him and, doubling the Horn, they made straight for Valparaiso. David Porter got wind of the pursuit but assumed that the *Phæbe* was alone. He made no attempt to avoid a meeting but on the contrary rather courted a fight with his old friend Hillyar, whom he had known socially on the Mediterranean station. For an officer of Porter's temper and training the capture of British whalers was a useful but by no means glorious employment. He believed the real vocation of a frigate of the American navy was to engage the enemy.

The *Phæbe* and the *Cherub* sailed into the Chilean roadstead in February, 1814, and found the *Essex* there. As Captain Hillyar was passing in to seek an anchorage, the mate of a British merchantman

climbed aboard to tell him that the *Essex* was unprepared for attack and could be taken with ease. Her officers had given a ball the night before in honor of the Spanish dignitaries of Valparaiso, and the decks were still covered with awnings and gay with bunting and flags. Reluctant to forego such a tempting opportunity, Captain Hillyar ran in and luffed his frigate within a few yards of the *Essex*. To his disappointed surprise, the American fighting ship was ready for action on the instant. Though the punctilious restraints of a neutral port should have compelled them to delay battle, Porter was vigilant and took no chances. The liberty parties had been recalled from shore, the decks had been cleared, the gunners were sent to quarters with matches lighted, and the boarders were standing by the hammock nettings with cutlasses gripped. Making the best of this unexpected turn of events, the English captain shouted a greeting to David Porter and politely conveyed his compliments, adding that his own ship was also ready for action. So close were the two frigates at this moment that the jib-boom of the *Phæbe* hung over the bulwarks of the *Essex*, and Porter called out sharply that if so much as a rope was touched he would reply with a broadside. The



urbane Captain Hillyar, perceiving his disadvantage, exclaimed, "I had no intention of coming so near you. I am very sorry indeed." With that he moved his ship to a respectful distance. Later he had a chat with Captain Porter ashore and, when asked if he intended to maintain the neutrality of the port, made haste to protest, "Sir, you have been so careful to observe the rules that I feel myself bound in honor to do the same."

After a few days the *Phæbe* and the *Cherub* left the harbor and watchfully waited outside, enforcing a strict blockade and determined to render the *Essex* harmless unless she should choose to sally out and fight. David Porter was an intrepid but not a reckless sailor. He had the faster frigate but he had unluckily changed her battery from the long guns to the more numerous but shorter range carronades. He was not afraid to risk a duel with the *Phæbe* even with this handicap in armament, but the sloop-of-war *Cherub* was a formidable vessel for her size and the *Essex, Junior*, which was only a converted merchantman, was of small account in a hammer-and-tongs action between naval ships.

For his part, Captain Hillyar had no intention of letting the Yankee frigate escape him. "He was an old disciple of Nelson," observes Mahan, "fully



imbued with the teaching that the achievement of success and not personal glory must dictate action. Having a well established reputation for courage and conduct, he intended to leave nothing to the chances of fortune which might decide a combat between equals. He therefore would accept no provocation to fight without the *Cherub*. His duty was to destroy the *Essex* with the least possible loss."

Porter endured this vexatious situation for six weeks and then, learning that other British frigates were on his trail, determined to escape to the open sea. This decision involved waiting for the most favorable moment of wind and weather, but Porter found his hand forced on the 28th of March by a violent southerly gale which swept over the exposed bay of Valparaiso and dragged the *Essex* from her anchorage. One of her cables parted while the crew struggled to get sail on her. As she drifted seaward, Porter decided to seize the emergency and take the long chance of running out to windward of the *Phæbe* and the *Cherub*. He therefore cut the other cable, and the *Essex* plunged into the wind under single-reefed topsails to claw past the headland. Just as she was about to clear it, a whistling squall carried away the maintopmast.

This accident was a grave disaster, for the disabled frigate was now unable either to regain a refuge in the bay or to win her way past the British ship.

As a last resort Captain Porter turned and ran along the coast, within pistol shot of it, far inside the three-mile limit of neutral water, and came to an anchor about three miles north of the city. Captain Hillyar had no legal right to molest him, but in his opinion the end justified the means and he resolved to attack. Deliberately the *Phæbe* and *Cherub* selected their stations and, late in this stormy afternoon, bombarded the crippled *Essex* without mercy. Porter with his carronades was unable to repay the damage inflicted by the broadsides of the longer guns, nor could he handle his ship to close in and retrieve the day in the desperate game of boarding. He tried this ultimate venture, nevertheless, and let go his cables. But the ship refused to move ahead. Her sheets, tacks, and halliards had been shot away. The canvas was hanging loose.

Porter's guns were by no means silent, however, even in this hopeless situation, and few crews have died harder or fought more grimly than these seamen of the *Essex*. Among them was a little midshipman, wounded but still at his post, a mere

child of thirteen years whose name was David Farragut. His fortune it was to link those early days of the American navy with a period half a century later when he won his renown as the greatest of American admirals.

In many a New England seaport were told the tales of this last fight of the *Essex* until they became almost legendary — of Seaman John Ripley, who cried, after losing his leg, "Farewell, boys, I can be of no more use to you," and thereupon flung himself overboard out of a bow port; of James Anderson, who died encouraging his comrades to fight bravely in defense of liberty; of Benjamin Hazen, who dressed himself in a clean shirt and jerkin, told his messmates that he could never submit to being taken prisoner by the English and forthwith leaped into the sea and was drowned. Such incidents help us to descry, amid the smoke and slaughter of that desperate encounter, the spirit of the gallant David Porter. Never was the saying, "It's not the ships but the men in them," better exemplified. To Porter was granted greatness in defeat, a lot that comes to few.

For two hours he and his men endured such dreadful punishment as not many ships have suffered. Again he attempted to work his way

nearer the enemy, until he had not enough men left unhurt to serve the guns or to haul at the pitifully splintered spars. In the last extremity, Porter made an effort to destroy his vessel and to save her people from captivity by letting the *Essex* drive ashore. A kedge anchor was let go, and a dozen sailors tramped around the capstan while the chantey man piped up a tune, but again fortune seemed against him for the hawser snapped, and the wind began to blow the frigate into deeper water. What happened then is best recalled in the simple words of Captain David Porter himself:

I now sent for the officers of division to consult them and what was my surprise to find only acting Lieutenant Stephen Decatur M'Knight remaining. . . . I was informed that the cockpit, the steerage, the ward-room, and the berth deck could contain no more wounded, that the wounded were killed while the surgeons were dressing them, and that if something was not speedily done to prevent it, the ship would soon sink from the number of shot holes in her bottom. On sending for the carpenter he informed me that all his crew had been killed or wounded.

The enemy, from the impossibility of reaching him with our carronades and the little apprehension that was excited by our fire, which had now become much slackened, was enabled to take aim at us as at a target; his shot never missed our hull and my ship was cut up in a manner which was perhaps never before witnessed;

in fine, I saw no hope of saving her, and at twenty minutes after 6 P.M. I gave the painful order to strike the colors. Seventy-five men including officers were all that remained of my whole crew after the action, many of them severely wounded, some of whom have since died.

The enemy still continued his fire and my brave, though unfortunate companions were still falling about me. I directed an opposite gun to be fired to show them we intended no further resistance but they did not desist. Four men were killed at my side and others at different parts of the ship. I now believed he intended to show us no quarter, that it would be as well to die with my flag flying as struck, and was on the point of again hoisting it when about ten minutes after hauling down the colors he ceased firing.

. . . We have been unfortunate but not disgraced — the defense of the *Essex* has not been less honorable to her officers and crew than the capture of an equal force; and I now consider my situation less unpleasant than that of Captain Hillyar, who in violation of every principle of honor and generosity, and regardless of the rights of nations, attacked the *Essex* in her crippled state within pistol shot of a neutral shore, when for six weeks I had daily offered him fair and honorable combat on terms greatly to his advantage.

The behavior of Captain Hillyar after the surrender, however, was most humane and courteous, and lapse of time has dispelled somewhat of the bitterness of the American opinion of him. If he

was not as chivalrous as his Yankee foemen had expected, it must be remembered that there was a heavy grudge and a long score to pay in the havoc wrought among British merchantmen and whalers and that in those days the rights of South American neutrals were rather lightly regarded.



## CHAPTER IX

### VICTORY ON LAKE CHAMPLAIN

SPECTACULAR as were the exploits of the American navy on the sea, they were of far less immediate consequence in deciding the destinies of the war than were the naval battles fought on fresh water between hastily improvised squadrons. On Lake Erie Perry's victory had recovered a lost empire and had made the West secure against invasion. Macdonough's handful of little vessels on Lake Champlain compelled the retreat of ten thousand British veterans of Wellington's campaigns who had marched down from Canada with every promise of crushing American resistance. This was the last and most formidable attempt on the part of the enemy to conquer territory and to wrest a decision by means of a sustained offensive. Its collapse marked the beginning of the end, and such events as the capture of Washington and the battle of New Orleans were in the nature of episodes.

That September day of 1814, when Macdonough won his niche in the naval hall of fame, was also the climax and the conclusion of the long struggle of the American armies on the northern frontier, a confused record of defeat, vacillation, and crumbling forces, which was redeemed towards the end by troops who had learned how to fight and by new leaders who restored the honor of the flag at Chippawa and Lundy's Lane. Although the ambitious attempts against Canada, so often repeated, were so much wasted effort until the very end, they ceased to be inglorious. The tide turned in the summer of 1814 with the renewal of the struggle for the Niagara region where the British had won a foothold upon American soil.

In command of a vigorous and disciplined American army was General Jacob Brown, that stout-hearted volunteer who had proved his worth when the enemy landed at Sackett's Harbor. He was not a professional soldier but his troops had been trained and organized by Winfield Scott who was now a brigadier. After two years of dismal reverses, the United States was learning how to wage war. Incompetency was no longer the badge of high military rank. A general was supposed to

know something about his trade and to have a will of his own.

With thirty-five hundred men, Jacob Brown made a resolute advance to find and join battle with the British forces of General Riall which garrisoned the forts of St. George's, Niagara, Erie, Queenston, and Chippawa. Early in the morning of July 3, 1814, the American troops in two divisions crossed the river and promptly captured Fort Erie. They then pushed ahead fifteen miles until they encountered the British defensive line on the Chippawa River where it flows into the Niagara.

The field was like a park, with open, grassy spaces and a belt of woodland which served as a green curtain to screen the movements of both armies. Riall boldly assumed the offensive, although he was aware that he had fewer men. His instructions intimated that liberties might be taken with the Americans which would seem hazardous "to a military man unacquainted with the character of the enemy he had to contend with, or with the events of the last two campaigns on that frontier." The deduction was unflattering but very much after the fact.

The British attack was unlooked for. It was the Fourth of July and in celebration Winfield

Scott had given his men the best dinner that the commissary could supply and was marching them into a meadow in the cool of the summer afternoon for drill and review. The celebration, however, was interrupted by firing and confusion among the militia who happened to be in front, and Scott rushed his brigade forward to take the brunt of the heavy assault. General Jacob Brown rode by at a gallop, waving his hat and cheerily shouting, "You will have a battle." He was hurrying to bring up his other forces, but meanwhile Scott's column crossed a bridge at the double-quick and faced the enemy's batteries.

Exposed, taken by surprise, and outnumbered, Winfield Scott and his regiments were nevertheless equal to the occasion. A battalion was sent to cover one flank in the dense woodland, while the main body drove straight for the columns of British infantry and then charged with bayonets at sixty paces. The American ranks were steady and unbroken although they were pelted with musketry fire, and they smashed a British counter-charge by three regiments before it gained momentum. Handsomely fought and won, it was not a decisive battle and might be called no more than a skirmish but its significance was highly important, for at

Chippawa there was displayed a new spirit in the American army.

Riall retreated with his red-coated regulars to a stronger line at Queenston, while Jacob Brown was sending anxious messages to Commodore Chauncey begging him to use his fleet in coöperation and so break the power of the enemy in Upper Canada. "For God's sake, let me see you," he implored. But again the American ships on Lake Ontario failed to seize an opportunity, and in this instance Chauncey's inactivity dismayed not only General Brown but also the Government at Washington. The fleet remained at Sackett's Harbor with excuses which appeared inadequate: certain changes were being made among the officers and crews, and again "the squadron had been prevented being earlier fitted for sea in consequence of the delay in obtaining blocks and iron-work." Chauncey subsequently fell ill, which may have had something to do with his lapse of energy. The whole career of this naval commander on Lake Ontario had disappointed expectations, even though the Secretary had commended his "zeal, talent, constancy, courage, and prudence of the highest order." The trouble was that Chauncey let slip one chance after another to win the control of Lake Ontario in

pitched battle. Always too intent on building more ships instead of fighting with those he had, he is therefore not remembered in the glorious companionship of Perry and Macdonough.

This failure to act at the moment when Jacob Brown was so valiantly endeavoring to wrest from the British the precious Niagara peninsula was responsible for the desperate and inconclusive battle of Lundy's Lane. Winfield Scott frankly blamed the unsuccessful result upon the freedom with which the British troops and supplies were moved on Lake Ontario. For ten days Jacob Brown had remained in a painful state of suspense and perplexity, until finally the word came that nobody knew when the American fleet would sail. As he had feared, the British command, able to move its troops unmolested across the lake, planned to attack him in the rear and to cut his communications on the New York side of the Niagara River. For this purpose two enemy brigs were filled with troops and were sent over to Fort Niagara with more to follow.

It was to parry this threat that Brown moved his forces and brought about the clash at Lundy's Lane. "As it appeared," he explained, "that the enemy with his increased strength was about to



avail himself of the hazard under which our baggage and stores were on our side of the Niagara, I conceived the most effectual method of recalling him from the object was to put myself in motion towards Queenston. General Scott with his brigade were accordingly put in march on the road leading thither."

The action was fought about a mile back from the torrent of the Niagara, below the Falls, where the by-road known as Lundy's Lane joined the main road running parallel with the river. Here Scott's column came suddenly upon a force of British redcoats led by General Drummond. Scott hesitated to attack, because the odds were against his one brigade, but, fearing the effect of a retreat on the divisions behind him, he sent word to Brown that he would hold his ground and try to turn the enemy's left toward the Niagara. It was late in the day and the sun had almost set. Gradually Scott forced the British wing back, and Brown threw in reinforcements until the engagement became general. The fight continued furious even after darkness fell and never have men employed in the business of killing each other shown courage more stubborn. Both sides were equally determined and they fought until exhaustion literally compelled a halt.

Later in the evening fresh troops were hurled in on both sides, and they were at it again with the same impetuosity. A small hill, over which ran Lundy's Lane, was the goal the Americans fought for. They finally stormed it, "in so determined a manner," reported the enemy, "that our artillery men were bayoneted in the act of loading and the muzzles of the enemy's guns were advanced within a few yards of ours." Back and forth flowed the tide of battle in bloody waves, until midnight. Then sullenly and in good order the Americans retired three miles to camp at Chippawa. Next day the enemy resumed the position and held it unattacked.

It is fair to call Lundy's Lane a drawn battle. The casualties were something more than eight hundred for each side, and the troops engaged were about twenty-five hundred Americans and a like number of British. Both the shattered columns soon retired behind strong defenses. General Drummond led the British troops into camp at Niagara Falls, and General Ripley, in temporary command of the American brigades, Scott and Brown having been wounded, occupied the unfinished works of Fort Erie, on the Canadian side, just where the waters of Lake Erie enter the Niagara River.

The British determined to bombard these walls and intrenchments with heavy guns and then carry them by infantry assault. But this plan failed disastrously. On the 15th of August the British charged in three columns the bastions and batteries only to be savagely repulsed at every point with a loss of nine hundred men killed, wounded, or prisoners, while the defenders had only eighty-five casualties. Then Drummond settled down to besiege the place and succeeded in making it so uncomfortable that Jacob Brown, now recovered from his wound, organized a sortie in force which was made on the 17th of September. In the action which followed, the British batteries were overwhelmed and the American militia displayed magnificent steadiness and valor. Jacob Brown proudly informed the Governor of New York that "the militia of New York have redeemed their character — they behaved gallantly. Of those called out by the last requisition, fifteen hundred have crossed the state border to our support. This reinforcement has been of immense importance to us; it doubled our effective strength, and their good conduct cannot but have the happiest effect upon our nation."

This bold stroke ended the Niagara campaign.

The British fell back, and the American army was in no condition for pursuit. In ten weeks Jacob Brown had fought four engagements without defeat and, barring the battle of New Orleans, his brief campaign was the one operation of the land war upon which Americans could look back with any degree of satisfaction.

The scene now shifted to Lake Champlain. The main work was the building up of an army to resist the menacing preparations for a British invasion from Montreal. Among the new American generals who had gained promotion by merit instead of favor was George Izard, trained in the military schools of England and Prussia, and an aide to Alexander Hamilton during his command of the army of the United States. Izard had been sent to Plattsburg in May, 1814, on the very eve of the great British campaign, and found everything in a deplorable state of unreadiness and inefficiency. While he was manfully struggling with these difficulties, Secretary Armstrong directed him to send four thousand of his men to the assistance of Jacob Brown on the Niagara front. General Izard obediently and promptly set out, although the defense of Lake Champlain was thereby deprived of this large body of troops. The expedition was

almost barren of results, however, and at a time when every trained soldier was needed to oppose the march of the British veterans, Izard was at Fort Erie, idle, waiting to build winter quarters and writing to the War Department: "I confess I am greatly embarrassed. At the head of the most efficient army the United States have possessed during this war, much must be expected of me; and yet I can discern no object which can be achieved at this point worthy of the risk which will attend its attempt."

Izard had already predicted that the withdrawal of his forces from Plattsburg would leave northeastern New York at the mercy of the British and he spoke the truth. No sooner had his divisions started westward than the British army, ten thousand strong, under General Prevost, crossed the frontier and marched rapidly toward the Saranac River and then straight on to Plattsburg. Possession of this trading town the British particularly desired because through it passed an enormous amount of illicit traffic with Canada. Both Izard and Prevost agreed in the statement that the British army was almost entirely fed on supplies drawn from New York and Vermont by way of Lake Champlain. "Two thirds of the army in



Canada are supplied with beef by American contractors," wrote Prevost, and there were not enough highways to accommodate the herds of cattle which were driven across the border.

To protect this source of supply by conquering the region was the task assigned the splendid army of British regulars who had fought under Wellington. The conclusion of the Peninsular campaign had released them for service in America, and England was now able for the first time to throw her military strength against the feeble forces of the United States. It was announced as the intention of the British Government to take and hold the lakes, from Champlain to Erie, as territorial waters and a permanent barrier. To oppose the large and seasoned army which was to effect these projects, there was an American force of only fifteen hundred men, led by Brigadier General Alexander Macomb. All he could do was to try to hold the defensive works at Plattsburg and to send forward small skirmishing parties to annoy the British army which advanced in solid column, without taking the trouble to deploy.

On the 6th of September Sir George Prevost with his army reached Plattsburg and encamped just outside the town. From a ridge the British leader



beheld the redoubts, strong field works, and block-houses, and at anchor in the bay the little American fleet of Commodore Thomas Macdonough. To Prevost it looked like a costly business to attempt to carry these defenses by assault and he therefore decided to await the arrival of the British ships of Captain George Downie. A combined attack by land and sea, he believed, should find no difficulty in wiping out American resistance.

Such was the situation and the weighty responsibility which confronted Macdonough and his sailors. It was the most critical moment of the war. With a seaman's eye for defense Macdonough met it by stationing his vessels in a carefully chosen position and prepared with a seaman's foresight for every contingency. Plattsburg Bay is about two miles wide and two long and lies open to the southward, with a cape called Cumberland Head bounding it on the east. It was in this sheltered water that Macdonough awaited attack, his ships riding about a mile from the American shore batteries. These guns were to be captured by the British army and turned against him, according to the plans of General Prevost, who was urging Captain Downie to hasten with his fleet and undertake a joint action, for, as he said, "it is of the highest

importance that the ships, vessels, and gunboats of your command should combine a coöperation with the division of the army under my command. I only wait for your arrival to proceed against General Macomb's last position on the south bank of the Saranac."

These demands became more and more insistent, although the largest British ship, the *Confiance*, had been launched only a few days before and the mechanics were still toiling night and day to fit her for action. She was a formidable frigate, of the size of the American *Chesapeake*, and was expected to be more than a match for Macdonough's entire fleet. Captain Downie certainly expected the support of the army, which he failed to receive, for he clearly stated his position before the naval battle. "When the batteries are stormed and taken possession of by the British land forces, which the commander of the land forces has promised to do at the moment the naval action commences, the enemy will be obliged to quit their position, whereby we shall obtain decided advantage over them during the confusion. I would otherwise prefer fighting them on the lake and would wait until our force is in an efficient state but I fear they would take shelter up the lake and would not meet me on equal terms."

Compelled to seek and offer battle in Plattsburg Bay, the British vessels rounded Cumberland Head on the morning of the 11th of September and hove to while Captain Downie went ahead in a boat to observe the American position. He perceived that Macdonough had anchored his fleet in line in this order: the brig *Eagle*, twenty guns, the flagship *Saratoga*, twenty-six guns, the schooner *Ticonderoga*, seven guns, and the sloop *Preble*, seven guns. There was also a considerable squadron of little gunboats, or galleys, propelled by oars and mounting one gun. Opposed to this force was the stately *Confiance*, with her three hundred men and thirty-seven guns, such a ship as might have dared to engage the *Constitution* on blue water, and the *Chub*, *Linnet*, and *Finch*, much like Macdonough's three smaller vessels, besides a flotilla of the tiny, impudent gunboats which were like so many hornets.

Macdonough was a youngster of twenty-eight years to whom was granted this opportunity denied the officers who had grown gray in the service. The navy, which was also very young, had set its own stamp upon him, and his advancement he had won by sheer ability. Self-reliant and indomitable, like Oliver Hazard Perry, he had wrestled with

obstacles and was ready to meet the enemy in spite of them. His fame among naval men outshines Perry's, and he is rated as the greatest fighting sailor who flew the American flag until Farragut surpassed them all.

The battle of Plattsburg Bay was contested straight from the shoulder with little chance for such evolutions as seeking the weather gage or wearing ship. With one fleet at anchor, as Nelson demonstrated at the Nile, the proper business of the other was to drive ahead and try to break the line or turn an end of it. This Captain Downie proceeded to attempt in a brave and highly skillful manner, with the *Confiance* leading into the bay and proposing to smash the *Eagle* with her first broadsides. The wind failed, however, and the British frigate dropped anchor within close range of the *Saratoga*, which displayed Macdonough's pennant, and pounded this vessel so accurately that forty American seamen, or one-fifth of the crew, were struck down by the first blast of the British guns.

Meanwhile the *Linnet* had reached her assigned berth and fought the American *Eagle* so successfully that the latter was disabled and had to leave the line. To balance this the *Chub* was so badly

damaged that she drifted helpless among the American ships and was compelled to haul down her colors. The *Finch* committed a blunder of seamanship and by failing to keep close enough to the wind, which soon died away, she finally went aground and took no part in the battle. The *Preble* was driven from her anchorage and ran ashore under the Plattsburg batteries, and the *Ticonderoga* played no heavier part than to beat off the little British galleys.

The decisive battle was therefore fought by four ships, the American *Saratoga* and *Eagle*, and the British *Confiance* and *Linnet*. It was then that Macdonough acquitted himself as a man who did not know when he was beaten. The *Confiance*, which must have towered like a ship of the line, had so cruelly mauled the *Saratoga* that she seemed doomed to be blown out of water. So many of his gunners were killed by the double-shotted broadsides that Macdonough jumped from the quarter-deck to take a hand himself and encourage the survivors. He was sighting a gun when a round shot cut the spanker boom, and a fragment of the heavy spar knocked him senseless.

Recovering his wits, however, he returned to his gun. But another shot tore off the head of the



gun captain and flung it in Macdonough's face with such force that he was hurled across the deck. At length all but one of the guns along the side exposed to the *Confiance* had been smashed or dismounted, and this last gun broke its fastening bolts, leaped from its carriage with the heavy recoil, and plunged into the main hatch. Silenced, shot through and through, her decks strewn with dead, the *Saratoga* might then have struck her colors with honor. But Macdonough had not begun to fight. Prepared for such an emergency, he let go a stern anchor, cut his bow cable, and "winded" or turned his ship around so that her other side with its uninjured row of guns was presented to the *Confiance*. Captain Downie had by this time been killed, and the acting commander of the British flagship endeavored to execute the same maneuver, but the *Confiance* was too badly crippled to be swung about. While she floundered, the *Saratoga* reduced her to submission. One of the surviving officers stated that "the ship's company declared they would no longer stand to their quarters nor could the officers with their utmost exertions rally them." The ship was sinking, with more than a hundred ragged holes in her hull and fivescore men dead or hurt. Fifteen minutes later the plucky *Linnet*



surrendered after a long and desperate duel with the *Eagle*. The British galleys escaped from the bay under sail and oar because no American ships were fit to chase them, but the Royal Navy had ceased to exist on Lake Champlain. For more than two hours the battle had been fought with a bulldog endurance not often equaled in the grim pages of naval history. And more nearly than any other incident of the War of 1812 it could be called decisive.

The American victory made the position of Prevost's army wholly untenable. With the control of Lake Champlain in Macdonough's hands, the British line of communication would be continually menaced. For the ten thousand veterans of Wellington's campaigns there was nothing to do but retreat, nor did they linger until they had marched across the Canada border. Though the way had lain open before them, they had not fought a battle, but were turned out of the United States, evicted, one might say, by a few small ships manned by several hundred American sailors. As Perry had regained the vast Northwest for his nation so, more momentously, did Macdonough avert from New York and New England a tide of invasion which could not otherwise have been stemmed.

## CHAPTER X

### PEACE WITH HONOR

THE raids of the British navy on the American seacoast through the last two years of the war were so many efforts to make effective the blockade which began with the proclamation of December, 1812, closing Chesapeake and Delaware bays. Successive orders in 1813 closed practically all the seaports from New London, Connecticut, to the Florida boundary, and the last sweeping proclamation of May, 1814, placed under strict blockade "all the ports, harbors, bays, creeks, rivers, inlets, outlets, islands, and seacoasts of the United States." It was the blockade of ports of the Middle States which caused such widespread ruin among merchants and shippers and which finally brought the Government itself to the verge of bankruptcy.

The first serious alarm was caused in the spring of 1813 by the appearance of a British fleet, under command of Admiral Sir John Borlase Warren and

Rear-Admiral George Cockburn, in the Chesapeake and Delaware bays. Apparently it had not occurred to the people of the seaboard that the war might make life unpleasant for them, and they had undertaken no measures of defense. Unmolested, Cockburn cruised up Cheapeake Bay to the mouth of the Susquehanna in the spring of 1813 and established a pleasant camp on an island from which five hundred sailors and marines harried the country at their pleasure, looting and burning such prosperous little towns as Havre de Grace and Fredericktown. The men of Maryland and Virginia proceeded to hide their chattels and to move their families inland. Panic took hold of these proud and powerful commonwealths. Cockburn had no scruples about setting the torch to private houses, "to cause the proprietors who had deserted them and formed part of the militia which had fled to the woods to understand and feel what they were liable to bring upon themselves by building forts and acting toward us with so much useless rancor." Though Cockburn was an officer of the British navy, he was also an unmitigated ruffian in his behavior toward non-combatants, and his own countrymen could not regard his career with satisfaction.

Admiral Warren had more justification in attacking Norfolk, which had a navy yard and forts and was therefore frankly belligerent. Unluckily for him the most important battery was manned by a hundred sailors from the *Constellation* and fifty marines. Seven hundred British seamen tried to land in barges, but the battery shattered three of the boats with heavy loss of life. Somewhat ruffled, Admiral Warren decided to go elsewhere and made a foray upon the defenseless village of Hampton during which he permitted his men to indulge in wanton pillage and destruction. Part of his fleet then sailed up to the Potomac and created a most distressing hysteria in Washington. The movement was a feint, however, and after frightening Baltimore and Annapolis, the ships cruised and blockaded the bay for several months.

In September of the following year another British division harassed the coast of Maine, first capturing Eastport and then landing at Belfast, Bangor, and Castine, and extorting large ransoms in money and supplies. New England was wildly alarmed. In a few weeks all of Maine east of the Penobscot had been invaded, conquered, and formally annexed to New Brunswick, although two counties alone might easily have furnished twelve

thousand fighting men to resist the small parties of British sailors who operated in leisurely security. The people of the coastwise towns gave up their sheep and bullocks to these rude trespassers, cut the corn and dug the potatoes for them, handed over all their powder and firearms, and agreed to finish and deliver schooners that were on the stocks.

Cape Cod was next to suffer, for two men-of-war levied contributions of thousands of dollars from Wellfleet, Brewster, and Eastham, and robbed and destroyed other towns. Farther south another fleet entered Long Island Sound, bombarded Stonington, and laid it in ruins. The pretext for all this havoc was a raid made by a few American troops who had crossed to Long Point on Lake Erie, May 15, 1814, and had burned some Canadian mills and a few dwellings. The expedition was promptly disowned by the American Government as unauthorized, but in retaliation the British navy was ordered to lay waste all towns on the Atlantic coast which were assailable, sparing only the lives of the unarmed citizens.

Included in the British plan of campaign for 1814 was a coastal attack important enough to divert American efforts from the Canadian frontier. This was why an army under General Ross was

loaded into transports at Bermuda and escorted by a fleet to Chesapeake Bay. The raids against small coastwise ports, though lucrative, had no military value beyond shaking the morale of the population. The objective of this larger operation was undecided. Either Baltimore or Washington was tempting. But first the British had to dispose of the annoying gunboat flotilla of Commodore Joshua Barney, who had made his name mightily respected as a seaman of the Revolution and who had never been known to shake in his shoes at sight of a dozen British ensigns. He had found shelter for his armed scows, for they were no more than this, in the Patuxent River, but as he could not hope to defend them against a combined attack by British ships and troops he wisely blew them up.

This turn of affairs left a fine British army all landed and with nothing else to do than promenade through a pleasant region with nobody to interfere. The generals and admirals discussed the matter and decided to saunter on to Washington instead of to Baltimore. In the heat of August the British regiments tramped along the highways, frequently halting to rest in the shade, until they were within ten miles of the capital of the nation. There they found the American outposts in a strong position



on high ground, but these tarried not, and the invaders sauntered on another mile before making camp for the night. It is difficult to regard the capture of Washington with the seriousness which that lamentable episode deserves. The city was greatly surprised to learn that the enemy actually intended a discourtesy so gross, and the Government was pained beyond expression. But beyond this display of emotion nothing was done. The war was now two years old but no steps whatever had been taken to defend Washington, although there was no room for doubt that a British naval force could ascend the river whenever it pleased.

The disagreeable tidings that fifty of the enemy's ships had anchored off the Potomac, however, reminded the President and his advisers that not a single ditch or rampart had been even planned, that no troops were at hand, that it was rather late for advice which seemed to be the only ammunition that was plentiful. Quite harmoniously, the soldier in command was General Winder who could not lose his head, even in this dire emergency, because he had none to lose. His record for ineptitude on the fighting front had, no doubt, recommended him for this place. He ran about Washington, ordering the construction of defenses which

there was no time to build, listening to a million frenzied suggestions, holding all manner of consultations, and imploring the Governors of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia to send militia.

The British army was less than five thousand strong. To oppose them General Winder hastily scrambled together between five and six thousand men, mostly militia with a sprinkling of regulars and four hundred sailors from Barney's flotilla. During the night before the alleged battle the camp was a scene of such confusion as may be imagined while futile councils of war were held. The troops when reviewed by President Madison realized Jefferson's ideal of a citizen soldiery, unskilled but strong in their love of home, flying to arms to oppose an invader. General Jacob Brown and Winfield Scott at Lundy's Lane, which was fought within the same month, could have pointed out, in language quite emphatic, that a large difference existed between the raw material and the finished product.

On the 24th of August the British army advanced to Bladensburg, five miles from Washington, where a bridge spanned the eastern branch of the Potomac. Here the hilly banks offered the Americans an excellent line of defense. The

Cabinet had gone to the Washington Navy Yard, by request of General Winder, to tell him what he ought to do, but this final conference was cut short by the news that the enemy was in motion. The American forces were still mobilizing in helter-skelter fashion, and there was a wild race to the scene of action by militiamen, volunteers, unattached regulars, sailors, generals, citizens at large, Cabinet members, and President Madison himself.

Some Maryland militia hastily joined the Baltimore troops on the ridge behind the village of Bladensburg, but part of General Winder's own forces were still on the march and had not yet been assigned positions when the advance column of British light infantry were seen to rush down the slope across the river and charge straight for the bridge. They bothered not to seek a ford or to turn a flank but made straight for the American center. It was here that Winder's artillery and his steadiest regiments were placed and they offered a stiff resistance, ripping up the British vanguard with grapeshot and mowing men down right and left. But these hardened British campaigners had seen many worse days than this on the bloody fields of Spain, and they pushed forward, closing the gaps in their ranks, until they had crossed the

bridge and could find a brief respite under cover of the trees which lined the stream. Advancing again, they ingeniously discharged flights of rockets and with these novel missiles they not only disorganized the militia in front of them but also stampeded the battery mules. Most of the American army promptly followed the mules and endeavored to set a new record for a foot race from Bladensburg to Washington. The Cabinet members and other dignified spectators were swept along in the rout.

Commodore Joshua Barney and his four hundred weather-beaten bluejackets declined to join this speed contest. They were used to rolling decks and had no aptitude for sprinting, besides which they held the simple-minded notion that their duty was to fight. Up to this time they had been held back by orders and now arrived just as the American lines broke in wild confusion. With them were five guns which they dragged into position across the main highway and speedily unlimbered. The British were hastening to overtake the fleeing enemy when they encountered this awkward obstacle. Three times they charged Barney's battery and were three times repulsed by sailors and marines who fought them with muskets, cutlasses,

and handspikes, and who served those five guns with an efficiency which would have pleased Isaac Hull or Bainbridge.

Unwilling to pay the price of direct attack, the British General Ross wisely ordered his infantry to surround Barney's stubborn contingent. The American troops who were presumed to support and protect this naval battery failed to hold their ground and melted into the mob which was swirling toward Washington. The sailors, though abandoned, continued to fight until the British were firing into them from the rear and from both flanks. Barney fell wounded and some of his gunners were bayoneted with lighted fuses in their hands. Snarling, undaunted, the sailors broke through the cordon and saved themselves, the last to leave a battlefield upon which not one American soldier was visible. They had used their ammunition to the end and they faced five thousand British veterans; wherefore they had done what the navy expected of them. On a day so shameful that no self-respecting American can read of it without blushing they had enacted the one redeeming episode. Commodore Barney described this action in a manner blunt and unadorned:



The engagement continued, the enemy advancing and our own army retreating before them, apparently in much disorder. At length the enemy made his appearance on the main road, in force, in front of my battery, and on seeing us made a halt. I reserved our fire. In a few minutes the enemy again advanced, when I ordered an eighteen-pounder to be fired, which completely cleared the road; shortly after, a second and a third attempt was made by the enemy to come forward but all were destroyed. They then crossed into an open field and attempted to flank our right. He was met there by three twelve-pounders, the marines under Captain Miller, and my men acting as infantry, and again was totally cut up. By this time not a vestige of the American army remained, except a body of five or six hundred posted on a height on my right, from which I expected much support from their fine situation.

Barney was made a prisoner, although his men stood by him until he ordered them to retreat. Loss of blood had made him too weak to be carried from the field. General Ross and Admiral Cockburn saw to it personally that he was well cared for and paid him the greatest respect and courtesy. As for the other British officers, they, too, were sportsmen who admired a brave man, even in the enemy's uniform, and Barney reported that they treated him "like a brother."

The American army had scampered to Wash-



ington with a total loss of ten killed and forty wounded among the five thousand men who had been assembled at Bladensburg to protect and save the capital. The British tried to pursue but the afternoon heat was blistering and the rapid pace set by the American forces proved so fatiguing to the invaders that many of them were bowled over by sunstroke. To permit their men to run themselves to death did not appear sensible to the British commanders, and they therefore sat down to gain their breath before the final promenade to Washington in the cool of the evening. They found a helpless, almost deserted city from which the Government had fled and the army had vanished.

The march had been orderly, with a proper regard for the peaceful inhabitants, but now Ross and Cockburn carried out their orders to plunder and burn. At the head of their troops they rode to the Capitol, fired a volley through the windows, and set fire to the building. Two hundred men then sought the President's mansion, ransacked the rooms, and left it in flames. Next day they burned the official buildings and several dwellings and, content with the mischief thus wrought, abandoned the forlorn city and returned to camp at

Bladensburg. But more vexation for the Americans was to follow, for a British fleet was working its way up the Potomac to anchor off Alexandria. Here there was the same frightened submission, with the people asking for terms and yielding up a hundred thousand dollars' worth of flour, tobacco, naval stores, and shipping.

The British squadron then returned to Chesapeake Bay and joined the main fleet which was preparing to attack Baltimore. The army of General Ross was recalled to the transports and was set ashore at the mouth of the Patapsco River while the ships sailed up to bombard Fort McHenry, where the star-spangled banner waved. To defend Baltimore by land there had been assembled more than thirteen thousand troops under command of General Samuel Smith. The tragical farce of Bladensburg, however, had taught him no lesson, and to oppose the five thousand toughened regulars of General Ross he sent out only three thousand green militia most of whom had never been under fire. They put up a wonderfully good fight and deserved praise for it, but wretched leadership left them drawn up in an open field, with both flanks unprotected, and they were soon driven back. Next morning — the 13th of September — the British

advanced but found the roads so blocked by fallen trees and entanglements that progress was slow and laborious. The intrenchments which crowned the hills of Baltimore appeared so formidable that the British decided to await action by the fleet and attempt a night assault.

General Ross was killed during the advance, and this loss caused confusion of council. The heavy ships were unable to lie within effective range of the forts because of shoal water and a barrier of sunken hulks, and Fort McHenry was almost undamaged by the bombardment of the lighter craft. All through the night a determined fire was returned by the American garrison of a thousand men, and, although the British fleet suffered little, Vice-Admiral Cochrane concluded that a sea attack was a hopeless enterprise. He so notified the army, which thereupon retreated to the transports, and the fleet sailed down Chesapeake Bay, leaving Baltimore free and unscathed.

Among those who watched Fort McHenry by the glare of artillery fire through this anxious night was a young lawyer from Washington, Francis Scott Key, who had been detained by the British fleet down the bay while endeavoring to effect an exchange of prisoners. He had a turn for

verse-making. Most of his poems were mediocre, but the sight of the Stars and Stripes still fluttering in the early morning breeze inspired him to write certain deathless stanzas which, when fitted to the old tune of *Anacreon in Heaven*, his country accepted as its national anthem. In this exalted moment it was vouchsafed him to sound a trumpet call, clear and far-echoing, as did Rouget de Lisle when, with soul aflame, he wrote the *Marseillaise* for France. If it was the destiny of the War of 1812 to weld the nation as a union, the spirit of the consummation was expressed for all time in the lines which a hundred million of free people sing today:

O! say can you see by the dawn's early light,  
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last  
gleaming  
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the  
perilous fight,  
O'er the ramparts we watch'd, were so gallantly  
streaming?

The luckless endeavor to capture Baltimore by sea and land was the last British expedition that alarmed the Atlantic coast. The hostile army and naval forces withdrew to Jamaica, from which

base were planned and undertaken the Louisiana campaign and the battle of New Orleans.

The brilliant leadership and operations of Andrew Jackson were so detached and remote from all other activities that he may be said to have fought a private war of his own. It had seemed clear to Madison that, as a military precaution, the control of West Florida should be wrenched from Spain, whose neutrality was dubious and whose Gulf territory was the rendezvous of privateers, pirates, and other lawless gentry, besides offering convenient opportunity for British invasion by sea. As early as the autumn of 1812 troops were collected to seize and hold this region for the duration of the war. The people of the Mississippi Valley welcomed the adventure with enthusiasm. It was to be aimed against a European power presumably friendly, but the sheer love of conquest and old grudges to settle were motives which brushed argument aside. Andrew Jackson was the major general of the Tennessee militia, and so many hardy volunteers flocked to follow him that he had to sift them out, mustering in at Nashville two thousand of whom he said: "They are the choicest of our citizens. They go at our call to do the will of



Government. No constitutional scruples trouble them. Nay, they will rejoice at the opportunity of placing the American eagle on the ramparts of Pensacola, Mobile, and Fort St. Augustine."

Where the fiery Andrew Jackson led, there was neither delay nor hesitation. At once he sent his backwoods infantry down river in boats, while the mounted men rode overland. Four weeks later the information overtook him at Natchez that Congress had refused to sanction the expedition. When the Secretary of War curtly told him that his corps was "dismissed from public service," Andrew Jackson in a furious temper ignored the order and marched his men back to Nashville instead of disbanding them. He was not long idle, however, for the powerful confederacy of the Creek Indians had been aroused by a visit of the great Tecumseh, and the drums of the war dance were sounding in sympathy with the tribes of the Canadian frontier. In Georgia and Alabama the painted prophets and medicine men were spreading tales of Indian victories over the white men at the river Raisin and Detroit. British officials, moreover, got wind of a threatened uprising in the South and secretly encouraged it.

The Alabama settlers took alarm and left their



log houses and clearings to seek shelter in the nearest blockhouses and stockades. One of these belonged to Samuel Mims, a half-breed farmer, who had prudently fortified his farm on a bend of the Alabama River. A square stockade enclosed an acre of ground around his house and to this refuge hastened several hundred pioneers and their families, with their negro slaves, and a few officers and soldiers. Here they were surprised and massacred by a thousand naked Indians who called themselves Red Sticks because of the wands carried by their fanatical prophets. Two hundred and fifty scalps were carried away on poles, and when troops arrived they found nothing but heaps of ashes, mutilated bodies, and buzzards feeding on the carrion.

From Fort Mims the Indians overran the country like a frightful scourge, murdering and burning, until a vast region was emptied of its people. First to respond to the pitiful calls for help was Tennessee, and within a few weeks twenty-five hundred infantry and a thousand cavalry were marching into Alabama, led by Andrew Jackson, who had not yet recovered from a wound received in a brawl with Thomas H. Benton. Among Jackson's soldiers were two young men after his own heart, David Crockett and Samuel Houston. The

villages of the fighting Creeks, at the Hickory Ground, lay beyond a hundred and sixty miles of wilderness, but Jackson would not wait for supplies. He plunged ahead, living somehow on the country, until his men, beginning to break under the strain of starvation and other hardships, declared open mutiny. But Jackson cursed, threatened, argued them into obedience again and again. When such persuasions failed, he planted cannon to sweep their lines and told them they would have to pass over his dead body if they refused to go on.

The failure of other bodies of troops to support his movements and a discouraged Governor of Tennessee could not daunt his purpose. He was told that the campaign had failed and that the struggle was useless. To this he replied that he would perish first and that energy and decision, together with the fresh troops promised him, would solve the crisis. Months passed, and the militia whose enlistments had expired went home, while the other broke out in renewed and more serious mutinies. The few regulars sent to Jackson he used as police to keep the militia in order. The court-martialing and shooting of a private had a beneficial effect.

With this disgruntled, unreliable, weary force,

Jackson came, at length, to a great war camp of the Creek Indians at a loop of the Tallapoosa River called Horsehoe Bend. Here some ten hundred picked warriors had built defensive works which were worthy of the talent of a trained engineer. They also had as effective firearms as the white troops who assaulted the stronghold. Andrew Jackson bombarded them with two light guns, sent his men over the breastworks, and captured the breastworks in hand-to-hand fighting in which quarter was neither asked nor given. No more than a hundred Indians escaped alive, and dead among the logs and brushwood were the three famous prophets, gorgeous in war paint and feathers, who had preached the doctrine of exterminating the paleface.

The name of Andrew Jackson spread far and wide among the hostile Indian tribes, and the fiercest chiefs dreaded it like a tempest. Some made submission, and others joined in signing a treaty of peace which Jackson dictated to them with terms as harsh as the temper of the man who had conquered them.

For his distinguished services Jackson was made a major general of the regular army. He was then ordered to Mobile, where his impetuous anger was aroused by the news that the British had landed at

Pensacola and had pulled down the Spanish flag. The splendor of this ancient seaport had passed away, and with it the fleets of galleons whose sailors heard the mission bells and saw the brass guns gleam from the stout fortresses which in those earlier days guarded the rich commerce of the overland trade route to St. Augustine.

Aforetime one of the storied and romantic ports of the Spanish Main, Pensacola now slumbered in unlovely decay and was no more than a village to which resorted the smugglers of the Caribbean, the pirates of the Gulf, and rascally men of all races and colors. The Spanish Governor still lived in the palace with a few slovenly troops, but he could no more than protest when a hundred royal marines came ashore from two British sloop-of-war, and the commander, Major Nicholls, issued a thunderous proclamation to the oppressed people of the American States adjoining, letting them know that he was ready to assist them in liberating their paternal soil from a faithless, imbecile Government. They were not to be alarmed at his approach. They were to range themselves under the standard of their forefathers or be neutral.

Having fired this verbal blunderbuss, Major Nicholls sent a sloop-of-war to enlist the support of

Jean and Pierre Lafitte, enterprising brothers who maintained on Baratavia Bay in the Gulf, some forty miles south of New Orleans, a most lucrative resort for pirates and slave traders. There they defied the law and the devil, trafficking in spoils filched from honest merchantmen whose crews had walked the plank. Pierre Lafitte was a very proper figure of a pirate himself, true to the best traditions of his calling. But withal he displayed certain gallantry to atone for his villainies, for he spurned British gold and persuasions and offered his sword and his men to defend New Orleans as one faithful to the American cause.

If it was the purpose of Nicholls to divert Jackson's attention from New Orleans which was to be the objective of the British expedition preparing at Jamaica, he succeeded admirably; but in deciding to attack Jackson's forces at Mobile, he committed a grievous error. The worthy Nicholls failed to realize that he had caught a Tartar in General Jackson — "Old Hickory," the sinewy backwoodsman who would sooner fight than eat and who was feared more than the enemy by his own men. As might have been expected, the garrison of one hundred and sixty soldiers who held Fort Bowyer, which dominated the harbor of



Mobile, solemnly swore among themselves that they would never surrender until the ramparts were demolished over their heads and no more than a corporal's guard survived. This was Andrew Jackson's way.

Four British ships, with a total strength of seventy-eight guns, sailed into Mobile Bay on the 15th of September and formed in line of battle, easily confident of smashing Fort Bowyer with its twenty guns, while the landing force of marines and Indians took position behind the sand dunes and awaited the signal. The affair lasted no more than an hour. The American gunnery overwhelmed the British squadron. The *Hermes* sloop-of-war was forced to cut her cable and drifted under a raking fire until she ran aground and was blown up. The *Sophie* withdrew after losing many of her seamen, and the two other ships followed her to sea after delaying to pick up the marines and Indians who merely looked on. Daybreak saw the squadron spreading topsails to return to Pensacola.

Andrew Jackson was eager to return the compliment but, not having troops enough at hand to march on Pensacola, he had to wait and fret until his force was increased to four thousand men. Then he hurled them at the objective with an energy



that was fairly astounding. On the 3d of November he left Mobile and three days later was demanding the surrender of Pensacola. The next morning he carried the town by storm, waited another day until the British had evacuated and blown up Fort Barrancas, six miles below the city, and then returned to Mobile. Sickness laid him low but, enfeebled as he was, he made the journey to New Orleans by easy stages and took command of such American troops as he could hastily assemble to ward off the mightiest assault launched by Great Britain during the War of 1812. It was known, and the warning had been repeated from Washington, that the enemy intended sending a formidable expedition against Louisiana, but when Jackson arrived early in December the Legislature had voted no money, raised no regiments, devised no plan of defense, and was unprepared to make any resistance whatever.

A British fleet of about fifty sail, carrying perhaps a thousand guns, had gathered for the task in hand. The decks were crowded with trained and toughened troops, the divisions which had scattered the Americans at Bladensburg with a volley and a shout, kilted Highlanders, famous regiments which had earned the praise of the Iron Duke in the

Spanish Peninsula, and brawny negro detachments recruited in the West Indies. It was such an army as would have been considered fit to withstand the finest troops in Europe. In command was one of England's most brilliant soldiers, General Sir Edward Pakenham, of whom Wellington had said, "my partiality for him does not lead me astray when I tell you that he is one of the best we have." He was the idol of his officers, who agreed that they had never served under a man whose good opinion they were so desirous of having, "and to fall in his estimation would have been worse than death." In brief, he was a high-minded and knightly leader who had seen twenty years of active service in the most important campaigns of Europe.

It was Pakenham's misfortune to be unacquainted with the highly irregular and unconventional methods of warfare as practiced in America, where troops preferred to take shelter instead of being shot down while parading across open ground in solid columns. Improvised breastworks were to him a novelty, and the lesson of Bunker Hill had been forgotten. These splendidly organized and seasoned battalions of his were confident of walking through the Americans at New Orleans as they had done at Washington, or as Pakenham himself

had smashed the finest French infantry at Salamanca when Wellington told him, "Ned, d'ye see those fellows on the hill? Throw your division into column; at them, and drive them to the devil."

Stranger than fiction was the contrast between the leaders and between the armies that fought this extraordinary battle of New Orleans when, after the declaration of peace, the United States won its one famous but belated victory on land. On the northern frontier such a man as Andrew Jackson might have changed the whole aspect of the war. He was a great general with the rare attribute of reading correctly the mind of an opponent and divining his course of action, endowed with an unyielding temper and an iron hand, a relentless purpose, and the faculty of inspiring troops to follow, obey, and trust him in the last extremity. He was one of them, typifying their passions and prejudices, their faults and their virtues, sharing their hardships as if he were a common private, never grudging them the credit in success.

In the light of previous events it is probable that any other American general would have felt justified in abandoning New Orleans without a contest. In the city itself were only eight hundred regulars newly recruited and a thousand volunteers. But

Jackson counted on the arrival of the hard-bitted, Indian-fighting regiments of Tennessee who were toiling through the swamps with their brigadiers, Coffee and Carroll. The foremost of them reached New Orleans on the very day that the British were landing on the river bank. Gaunt, unshorn, untamed were these rough-and-tumble warriors who feared neither God nor man but were glad to fight and die with Andrew Jackson. In coonskin caps, buckskin shirts, fringed leggings, they swaggered into New Orleans, defiant of discipline and impatient of restraint, hunting knives in their belts, long rifles upon their shoulders. There they drank with seamen as wild as themselves who served in the ships of Jackson's small naval force or had offered to lend a hand behind the stockades, and with lean, long-legged Yankees from down East, swarthy outlaws who sailed for Pierre Lafitte, Portuguese and Norwegian wanderers who had deserted their merchant vessels, and even Spanish adventurers from the West Indies.

The British fleet disembarked its army late in December after the most laborious difficulties because of the many miles of shallow bayou and toilsome marsh which delayed the advance. A week was required to carry seven thousand men in small

boats from the ships to the Isle aux Poix on Lake Borgne chosen as a landing base. Thence a brigade passed in boats up the bayou and on the 23d of December disembarked at a point some three miles from the Mississippi and then by land and canal pushed on to the river's edge. Here they were attacked at night by Jackson with about two thousand troops, while a war schooner shelled the British left from the river. It was a weird fight. Squads of Grenadiers, Highlanders, Creoles, and Tennessee backwoodsmen blindly fought each other in the fog with knives, fists, bayonets, and musket butts. Jackson then fell back while the British brigade waited for more troops and artillery.

On Christmas Day Pakenham took command of the forces at the front now augmented to about six thousand, but hesitated to attack. And well he might hesitate, in spite of his superior numbers, for Jackson had employed his time well and now lay entrenched behind a parapet, protected by a canal or ditch ten feet wide. With infinite exertion more guns were dragged and floated to the front until eight heavy batteries were in position. On the morning of the 1st of January the British gunners opened fire and felt serenely certain of destroying the rude defenses of cotton bales and



cypress logs. To their amazement the American artillery was served with far greater precision and effect by the sailors and regulars who had been trained under Jackson's direction. By noon most of the British guns had been silenced or dismounted and the men killed or driven away. "Never was any failure more remarkable or unlooked for than this," said one of the British artillery officers. General Pakenham, in dismay, held a council of war. It is stated that his own judgment was swayed by the autocratic Vice-Admiral Cochrane who tauntingly remarked that "if the army could not take those mud-banks, defended by ragged militia, he would undertake to do it with two thousand sailors armed only with cutlases and pistols."

Made cautious by this overwhelming artillery reverse, the British army remained a week in camp, a respite of which every hour was priceless to Andrew Jackson, for his mud-stained, haggard men were toiling with pick and shovel to complete the ditches and log barricades. They could hear the British drums and bugles echo in the gloomy cypress woods while the cannon grumbled incessantly. The red-coated sentries were stalked and the pickets were ambushed by the Indian fighters who



spread alarm and uneasiness. Meanwhile Pakenham was making ready with every resource known to picked troops, who had charged unshaken through the slaughter of Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz, and San Sebastian, and who were about to justify once more the tribute to the British soldier: "Give him a plain, unconditional order — go and do *that* — and he will do it with a cool, self-forgetting pertinacity that can scarcely be too much admired."

It was Pakenham's plan to hurl a flank attack against the right bank of the Mississippi while he directed the grand assault on the east side of the river where Jackson's strength was massed. To protect the flank, Commodore Patterson of the American naval force had built a water battery of nine guns and was supported by eight hundred militia. Early in the morning of the 8th of January twelve hundred men in boats, under the British Colonel Thornton, set out to take this west bank as the opening maneuver of the battle. Their errand was delayed, although later in the day they succeeded in defeating the militia and capturing the naval guns. This minor victory, however, was too late to save Pakenham's army which had been cut to pieces in the frontal assault.

Jackson had arranged his main body of troops

along the inner edge of the small canal extending from a levee to a tangled swamp. The legendary cotton bales had been blown up or set on fire during the artillery bombardment and protection was furnished only by a raw, unfinished parapet of earth and a double row of log breastworks with red clay tamped between them. It was a motley army that Jackson led. Next to the levee were posted a small regiment of regular infantry, a company of New Orleans Rifles, a squad of dragoons who were handling a howitzer, and a battalion of Creoles in bright uniforms. The line was extended by the freebooters of Pierre Lafitte, their heads bound with crimson kerchiefs, a group of American blue-jackets, a battalion of blacks from San Domingo, a few grizzled old French soldiers serving a brass gun, long rows of tanned, saturnine Tennesseans, more regulars with a culverin, and rank upon rank of homespun hunting shirts and long rifles, John Adair and his savage Kentuckians, and, knee-deep in the swamp, the frontiersmen who followed General Coffee to death or glory.

A spirit of reckless elation pervaded this bizarre and terrible little army, although it was well aware that during two and a half years almost every other American force had been defeated by an enemy far

less formidable. The anxious faces were those of the men of Louisiana who fought for hearth and home, with their backs to the wall. Many a brutal tale had they heard of these war-hardened British veterans whose excesses in Portugal were notorious and who had laid waste the harmless hamlets of Maryland. All night Andrew Jackson's defenders stood on the *qui vive* until the morning mist of the 8th of January was dispelled and the sunlight flashed on the solid ranks of British bayonets no more than four hundred yards away.

At the signal rocket the enemy swept forward toward the canal, with companies of British sappers bearing scaling ladders and fascines of sugar cane. They moved with stolid unconcern, but the American cannon burst forth and slew them until the ditch ran red with blood. With cheers the invincible British infantry tossed aside its heavy knapsacks, scrambled over the ditch, and broke into a run to reach the earthworks along which flamed the sparse line of American rifles. Against such marksmen as these there was to be no work with the bayonet, for the assaulting column literally fell as falls the grass under the keen scythe. The survivors retired, however, only to join a fresh attack which was rallied and led by Pakenham himself.

He died with his men, but once more British pluck attempted the impossible, and the Highland brigade was chosen to lead this forlorn hope. That night the pipers wailed *Lochaber no more* for the mangled dead of the MacGregors, the MacLeans, and the MacDonalds who lay in windrows with their faces to the foe. This was no Bladensburg holiday, and the despised Americans were paying off many an old score. Two thousand of the flower of Britain's armies were killed or wounded in the few minutes during which the two assaults were so rashly attempted in parade formation. Coolly, as though at a prize turkey shoot on a tavern green, the American riflemen fired into these masses of doomed men, and every bullet found its billet.

On the right of the line a gallant British onslaught led by Colonel Rennie swept over a redoubt and the American defenders died to a man. But the British wave was halted and rolled back by a tempest of bullets from the line beyond, and the broken remnant joined the general retreat which was sounded by the British trumpeters. An armistice was granted next day and in shallow trenches the dead were buried, row on row, while the muffled drums rolled in honor of three generals, seven

colonels, and seventy-five other officers who had died with their men. Behind the log walls and earthworks loafed the unkempt, hilarious heroes of whom only seventy-one had been killed or hurt, and no more than thirteen of these in the grand assault which Pakenham had led. "Old Hickory" had told them that they could lick their weight in wildcats, and they were ready to agree with him.

Magnificent but useless, after all, excepting as a proud heritage for later generations and a vindication of American valor against odds, was this battle of New Orleans which was fought while the Salem ship, *Astrea*, Captain John Derby, was driving home to the westward with the news that a treaty of peace had been signed at Ghent. With a sense of mutual relief the United States and England had concluded a war in which neither nation had definitely achieved its aims. The treaty failed to mention such vital issues as the impressment of seamen and the injury to commerce by means of paper blockades, while on the other hand England relinquished its conquest of the Maine coast and its claim to military domination of the Great Lakes. English statesmen were heartily tired of a war in which they could see neither profit nor glory, and even the Duke of Wellington had announced it as



his opinion "that no military advantage can be expected if the war goes on, and I would have great reluctance in undertaking the command unless we made a serious effort first to obtain peace without insisting upon keeping any part of our conquests." The reverses of first-class British armies at Plattsburg, Baltimore, and New Orleans had been a bitter blow to English pride. Moreover, British commerce on the seas had been largely destroyed by a host of Yankee privateers, and the common people in England were suffering from scarcity of food and raw materials and from high prices to a degree comparable with the distress inflicted by the German submarine campaign a century later. And although the terms of peace were unsatisfactory to many Americans, it was implied and understood that the flag and the nation had won a respect and recognition which should prevent a recurrence of such wrongs as had caused the War of 1812. One of the Peace Commissioners, Albert Gallatin, a man of large experience, unquestioned patriotism, and lucid intelligence, set it down as his deliberate verdict:

The war has been productive of evil and of good, but I think the good preponderates. Independent of the loss of lives, and of the property of individuals, the



war has laid the foundation of permanent taxes and military establishments which the Republicans had deemed unfavorable to the happiness and free institutions of our country. But under our former system we were becoming too selfish, too much attached exclusively to the acquisition of wealth, above all, too much confined in our political feelings to local and state objects. The war has renewed and reinstated the national feeling and character which the Revolution had given, and which were daily lessening. The people have now more general objects of attachment, with which their pride and political opinions are connected. They are more Americans; they feel and act more as a nation; and I hope that the permanency of the Union is thereby better secured.

After a hundred years, during which this peace was unbroken, a commander of the American navy, speaking at a banquet in the ancient Guildhall of London, was bold enough to predict: "If the time ever comes when the British Empire is seriously menaced by an external enemy, it is my opinion that you may count upon every man, every dollar, and every drop of blood of your kindred across the sea."

The prediction came true in 1917, and traditional enmities were extinguished in the crusade against a mutual and detestable foe. The candid naval officer became Vice-Admiral William S. Sims,

commanding all the American ships and sailors in European waters, where the Stars and Stripes and the British ensign flew side by side, and the squadrons toiled and dared together in the finest spirit of admiration and respect. Out from Queenstown sailed an American destroyer flotilla operated by a stern, inflexible British admiral who was never known to waste a compliment. At the end of the first year's service he said to the officers of these hard-driven vessels:

I wish to express my deep gratitude to the United States officers and ratings for the skill, energy, and unfailing good nature which they have all so consistently shown and which qualities have so materially assisted in the war by enabling ships of the Allied Powers to cross the ocean in comparative freedom.

*To command you is an honor, to work with you is a pleasure, to know you is to know the finest traits of the Anglo-Saxon race.*

The United States waged a just war in 1812 and vindicated the principles for which she fought, but as long as the poppies blow in Flanders fields it is the clear duty, and it should be the abiding pleasure, of her people to remember, not those far-off days as foemen, but these latter days as comrades in arms.



## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

OF the scores of books that have been written about the War of 1812, many deal with particular phases, events, or personalities, and most of them are biased by partisan feeling. This has been unfortunately true of the textbooks written for American schools, which, by ignoring defeats and blunders, have missed the opportunity to teach the lessons of experience. By all odds the best, the fairest, and the most complete narrative of the war as written by an American historian is the monumental work of Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America*, 9 vols. (1889-91). The result of years of scholarly research, it is also most excellent reading.

Captain Mahan's *Sea Power in its Relation to the War of 1812*, 2 vols. (1905), is, of course, the final word concerning the naval events, but he also describes with keen analysis the progress of the operations on land and fills in the political background of cause and effect. Theodore Roosevelt's *The Naval War of 1812* (1882) is spirited and accurate but makes no pretensions to a general survey. Akin to such a briny book as this but more restricted in scope is *The Frigate Constitution* (1900) by Ira N. Hollis, or Rodney Macdonough's *Life of Commodore Thomas Macdonough* (1909). Edgar Stanton Maclay in *The History of the Navy*, 3 vols.

(1902), has written a most satisfactory account, which contains some capital chapters describing the immortal actions of the Yankee frigates.

Benson J. Lossing's *The Pictorial Field Book of the War of 1812* (1868) has enjoyed wide popularity because of his gossipy, entertaining quality. The author gathered much of his material at first hand and had the knack of telling a story; but he is not very trustworthy.

As a solemn warning, the disasters of the American armies have been employed by several military experts. The ablest of these was Bvt. Major General Emory Upton, whose invaluable treatise, *The Military Policy of the United States* (1904), was pigeonholed in manuscript by the War Department and allowed to gather dust for many years. He discusses in detail the misfortunes of 1812 as conclusive proof that the national defense cannot be entrusted to raw militia and untrained officers. Of a similar trend but much more recent are Frederic L. Huidekoper's *The Military Unpreparedness of the United States* (1915) and Major General Leonard Wood's *Our Military History; Its Facts and Fallacies* (1916).

Of the British historians, William James undertook the most diligent account of them all, calling it *A Full and Correct Account of the Military Occurrences of the Late War between Great Britain and the United States of America*, 2 vols. (1818). It is irritating reading for an American because of an enmity so bitter that facts are willfully distorted and glaring inaccuracies are accepted as truth. As a naval historian James undertook to explain away the American victories in single-ship actions, a difficult task in which he acquitted himself with poor grace. Theodore Roosevelt is at his best

when he chastises James for his venomous hatred of all things American.

To the English mind the War of 1812 was only an episode in the mighty and prolonged struggle against Napoleon, and therefore it finds but cursory treatment in the standard English histories. To Canada, however, the conflict was intimate and vital, and the narratives written from this point of view are sounder and of more moment than those produced across the water. *The Canadian War of 1812* (1906), published almost a century after the event, is the work of an Englishman, Sir Charles P. Lucas, whose lifelong service in the Colonial Office and whose thorough acquaintance with Canadian history have both been turned to the best account. Among the Canadian authors in this field are Colonel Ernest A. Cruikshank and James Hannay. To Colonel Cruikshank falls the greater credit as a pioneer with his *Documentary History of the Campaign upon the Niagara Frontier*, 8 vols. (1896-). Hannay's *How Canada Was Held for the Empire; The Story of the War of 1812* (1905) displays careful study but is marred by the controversial and one-sided attitude which this war inspired on both sides of the border.

Colonel William Wood has avoided this flaw in his *War with the United States* (1915) which was published as a volume of the *Chronicles of Canada* series. As a compact and scholarly survey, this little book is recommended to Americans who comprehend that there are two sides to every question. The Canadians fought stubbornly and successfully to defend their country against invasion in a war whose slogan "Free Trade and Sailors' Rights" was no direct concern of theirs.





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PART II  
THE OLD MERCHANT MARINE  
A CHRONICLE  
OF AMERICAN SHIPS AND SAILORS  
BY  
RALPH D. PAINE



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# THE OLD MERCHANT MARINE

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## CHAPTER I

### COLONIAL ADVENTURERS IN LITTLE SHIPS

THE story of American ships and sailors is an epic of blue water which seems singularly remote, almost unreal, to the later generations. A people with a native genius for seafaring won and held a brilliant supremacy through two centuries and then forsook this heritage of theirs. The period of achievement was no more extraordinary than was its swift declension. A maritime race whose topsails flecked every ocean, whose captains courageous from father to son had fought with pike and carronade to defend the freedom of the seas, turned inland to seek a different destiny and took no more thought for the tall ships and rich cargoes which had earned so much renown for its flag.

Vanished fleets and brave memories — a chronicle of America which had written its closing chapters before the Civil War! There will be other Yankee merchantmen in times to come, but never days like those when skippers sailed on seas uncharted in quest of ports mysterious and unknown.

The Pilgrim Fathers, driven to the northward of their intended destination in Virginia, landed on the shore of Cape Cod not so much to clear the forest and till the soil as to establish a fishing settlement. Like the other Englishmen who long before 1620 had steered across to harvest the cod on the Grand Bank, they expected to wrest a livelihood mostly from salt water. The convincing argument in favor of Plymouth was that it offered a good harbor for boats and was “a place of profitable fishing.” Both pious and amphibious were these pioneers whom the wilderness and the red Indian confined to the water’s edge, where they were soon building ships to trade corn for beaver skins with the Kennebec colony.

Even more energetic in taking profit from the sea were the Puritans who came to Massachusetts Bay in 1629, bringing carpenters and shipbuilders with them to hew the pine and oak so close at hand into keelsons, frames, and planking. Two years

later, Governor John Winthrop launched his thirty-ton sloop *Blessing of the Bay*, and sent her to open "friendly commercial relations" with the Dutch of Manhattan. Brisk though the traffic was in furs and wampum, these mariners of Boston and Salem were not content to voyage coastwise. Off-shore fishing made skilled, adventurous seamen of them, and what they caught with hook and line, when dried and salted, was readily exchanged for other merchandise in Bermuda, Barbados, and Europe.

A vessel was a community venture, and the custom still survives in the ancient ports of the Maine coast where the shapely wooden schooners are fashioned. The blacksmith, the rigger, the calker, took their pay in shares. They became part owners, as did likewise the merchant who supplied stores and material; and when the ship was afloat, the master, the mates, and even the seamen, were allowed cargo space for commodities which they might buy and sell to their own advantage. Thus early they learned to trade as shrewdly as they navigated, and every voyage directly concerned a whole neighborhood.

This kind of enterprise was peculiar to New England because other resources were lacking. To the



westward the French were more interested in exploring the rivers leading to the region of the Great Lakes and in finding fabulous rewards in furs. The Dutch on the Hudson were similarly engaged by means of the western trails to the country of the Iroquois, while the planters of Virginia had discovered an easy opulence in the tobacco crop, with slave labor to toil for them, and they were not compelled to turn to the hardships and the hazards of the sea. The New Englander, hampered by an unfriendly climate, hard put to it to grow sufficient food, with land immensely difficult to clear, was between the devil and the deep sea, and he sagaciously chose the latter. Elsewhere in the colonies the forest was an enemy to be destroyed with infinite pains. The New England pioneer regarded it with favor as the stuff with which to make stout ships and step the straight masts in them.

And so it befell that the seventeenth century had not run its course before New England was hardly afloat on every Atlantic trade route, causing Sir Josiah Child, British merchant and economist, to lament in 1668 that in his opinion nothing was "more prejudicial and in prospect more dangerous to any mother kingdom than the increase of shipping in her colonies, plantations, or provinces."

This absorbing business of building wooden vessels was scattered in almost every bay and river of the indented coast from Nova Scotia to Buzzard's Bay and the sheltered waters of Long Island Sound. It was not restricted, as now, to well-equipped yards with crews of trained artisans. Hard by the huddled hamlet of log houses was the row of keel-blocks sloping to the tide. In winter weather too rough for fishing, when the little farms lay idle, this Yankee Jack-of-all-trades plied his axe and adze to shape the timbers, and it was a routine task to peg together a sloop, a ketch, or a brig, mere cockle-shells, in which to fare forth to London, or Cadiz, or the Windward Islands — some of them not much larger and far less seaworthy than the lifeboat which hangs at a liner's davits. Pinching poverty forced him to dispense with the ornate, top-heavy cabins and forecastles of the foreign merchantmen, while invention, bred of necessity, molded finer lines and less clumsy models to weather the risks of a stormy coast and channels beset with shoals and ledges. The square-rig did well enough for deep-water voyages, but it was an awkward, lubberly contrivance for working along shore, and the colonial Yankee therefore evolved the schooner with her flat fore-and-aft

sails which enabled her to beat to windward and which required fewer men in the handling.

Dimly but unmistakably these canny seafarers in their rude beginnings foreshadowed the creation of a merchant marine which should one day comprise the noblest, swiftest ships driven by the wind and the finest sailors that ever trod a deck. Even then these early vessels were conspicuously efficient, carrying smaller crews than the Dutch or English, paring expenses to a closer margin, daring to go wherever commerce beckoned in order to gain a dollar at peril of their skins.

By the end of the seventeenth century more than a thousand vessels were registered as built in the New England colonies, and Salem already displayed the peculiar talent for maritime adventure which was to make her the most illustrious port of the New World. The first of her line of shipping merchants was Philip English, who was sailing his own ketch *Speedwell* in 1676 and so rapidly advanced his fortunes that in a few years he was the richest man on the coast, with twenty-one vessels which traded coastwise with Virginia and offshore with Bilbao, Barbados, St. Christopher's, and France. Very devout were his bills of lading, flavored in this manner: "Twenty hogsheads of

salt, shipped by the Grace of God in the good sloop called the *Mayflower*. . . . and by God's Grace bound to Virginia or Merriland."

No less devout were the merchants who ordered their skippers to cross to the coast of Guinea and fill the hold with negroes to be sold in the West Indies before returning with sugar and molasses to Boston or Rhode Island. The slave-trade flourished from the very birth of commerce in Puritan New England and its golden gains and exotic voyages allured high-hearted lads from farm and counter. In 1640 the ship *Desire*, built at Marblehead, returned from the West Indies and "brought some cotton and tobacco and negroes, etc. from thence." Earlier than this the Dutch of Manhattan had employed black labor, and it was provided that the Incorporated West India Company should "allot to each Patroon twelve black men and women out of the Prizes in which Negroes should be found."

It was in the South, however, that this kind of labor was most needed and, as the trade increased, Virginia and the Carolinas became the most lucrative markets. Newport and Bristol drove a roaring traffic in "rum and niggers," with a hundred sail to be found in the infamous Middle Passage. The

master of one of these Rhode Island slavers, writing home from Guinea in 1736, portrayed the congestion of the trade in this wise: "For never was there so much Rum on the Coast at one time before. Not ye like of ye French ships was never seen before, for ye whole coast is full of them. For my part I can give no guess when I shall get away, for I purchast but 27 slaves since I have been here, for slaves is very scarce. We have had nineteen Sail of us at one time in ye Road, so that ships that used to carry pryme slaves off is now forced to take any that comes. Here is seven sail of us Rum men that are ready to devour one another, for our case is desprit."

Two hundred years of wickedness unspeakable and human torture beyond all computation, justified by Christian men and sanctioned by governments, at length rending the nation asunder in civil war and bequeathing a problem still unsolved — all this followed in the wake of those first voyages in search of labor which could be bought and sold as merchandise. It belonged to the dark ages with piracy and witchcraft, better forgotten than recalled, save for its potent influence in schooling brave seamen and building faster ships for peace and war.



These colonial seamen, in truth, fought for survival amid dangers so manifold as to make their hardihood astounding. It was not merely a matter of small vessels with a few men and boys daring distant voyages and the mischances of foundering or stranding, but of facing an incessant plague of privateers, French and Spanish, Dutch and English, or a swarm of freebooters under no flag at all. Coasts were unlighted, charts few and unreliable, and the instruments of navigation almost as crude as in the days of Columbus. Even the savage Indian, not content with lurking in ambush, went afloat to wreak mischief, and the records of the First Church of Salem contain this quaint entry under date of July 25, 1677: "The Lord having given a Commission to the Indians to take no less than 13 of the Fishing Ketches of Salem and Captivate the men . . . it struck a great consternation into all the people here. The Pastor moved on the Lord's Day, and the whole people readily consented, to keep the Lecture Day following as a Fast Day, which was accordingly done. . . . The Lord was pleased to send in some of the Ketches on the Fast Day which was looked on as a gracious smile of Providence. Also there had been 19 wounded men sent into Salem a little



while before; also a Ketch sent out from Salem as a man-of-war to recover the rest of the Ketches. The Lord give them Good Success."

To encounter a pirate craft was an episode almost commonplace and often more sordid than picturesque. Many of these sea rogues were thieves with small stomach for cutlasses and slaughter. They were of the sort that overtook Captain John Shattuck sailing home from Jamaica in 1718 when he reported his capture by one Captain Charles Vain, "a Pyrat" of 12 guns and 120 men who took him to Crooked Island, plundered him of various articles, stripped the brig, abused the crew, and finally let him go. In the same year the seamen of the *Hopewell* related that near Hispaniola they met with pirates who robbed and ill-treated them and carried off their mate because they had no navigator.

Ned Low, a gentleman rover of considerable notoriety, stooped to filch the stores and gear from a fleet of fourteen poor fishermen off Cape Sable. He had a sense of dramatic values, however, and frequently brandished his pistols on deck, besides which, as set down by one of his prisoners, "he had a young child in Boston for whom he entertained such tenderness that on every lucid interval from

drinking and revelling, I have seen him sit down and weep plentifully.”

A more satisfying figure was Thomas Pounds, who was taken by the sloop *Mary*, sent after him from Boston in 1689. He was discovered in Vineyard Sound, and the two vessels fought a gallant action, the pirate flying a red flag and refusing to strike. Captain Samuel Pease of the *Mary* was mortally wounded, while Pounds, this proper pirate, strode his quarter-deck and waved his naked sword, crying, “Come on board, ye dogs, and I will strike *you* presently.” This invitation was promptly accepted by the stout seamen from Boston, who thereupon swarmed over the bulwark and drove all hands below, preserving Thomas Pounds to be hanged in public.

In 1703 John Quelch, a man of resource, hoisted what he called “Old Roger” over the *Charles* — a brigantine which had been equipped as a privateer to cruise against the French of Acadia. This curious flag of his was described as displaying a skeleton with an hour-glass in one hand and “a dart in the heart with three drops of blood proceeding from it in the other.” Quelch led a mutiny, tossed the skipper overboard, and sailed for Brazil, capturing several merchantmen on the way and

looting them of rum, silks, sugar, gold dust, and munitions. Rashly he came sailing back to Marblehead, primed with a plausible yarn, but his men talked too much when drunk and all hands were jailed. Upon the gallows Quelch behaved exceedingly well, "pulling off his hat and bowing to the spectators," while the somber Puritan merchants in the crowd were, many of them, quietly dealing in the merchandise fetched home by pirates who were lucky enough to steer clear of the law.

This was a shady industry in which New York took the more active part, sending out supplies to the horde of pirates who ravaged the waters of the Far East and made their haven at Madagascar, and disposing of the booty received in exchange. Governor Fletcher had dirtied his hands by protecting this commerce and, as a result, Lord Bellomont was named to succeed him. Said William III, "I send you, my Lord, to New York, because an honest and intrepid man is wanted to put these abuses down, and because I believe you to be such a man."

Such were the circumstances in which Captain William Kidd, respectable master mariner in the merchant service, was employed by Lord Bellomont, royal Governor of New York, New Hampshire, and

Massachusetts, to command an armed ship and harry the pirates of the West Indies and Madagascar. Strangest of all the sea tales of colonial history is that of Captain Kidd and his cruise in the *Adventure-Galley*. His name is reddened with crimes never committed, his grisly phantom has stalked through the legends and literature of piracy, and the Kidd tradition still has magic to set treasure-seekers exploring almost every beach, cove, and headland from Halifax to the Gulf of Mexico. Yet if truth were told, he never cut a throat or made a victim walk the plank. He was tried and hanged for the trivial offense of breaking the head of a mutinous gunner of his own crew with a wooden bucket. It was even a matter of grave legal doubt whether he had committed one single piratical act. His trial in London was a farce. In the case of the captured ships he alleged that they were sailing under French passes, and he protested that his privateering commission justified him, and this contention was not disproven. The suspicion is not wanting that he was condemned as a scapegoat because certain noblemen of England had subscribed the capital to outfit his cruise, expecting to win rich dividends in gold captured from the pirates he was sent to

attack. Against these men a political outcry was raised, and as a result Captain Kidd was sacrificed. He was a seaman who had earned honorable distinction in earlier years, and fate has played his memory a shabby trick.

It was otherwise with Blackbeard, most flamboyant of all colonial pirates who filled the stage with swaggering success, chewing wine-glasses in his cabin, burning sulphur to make his ship seem more like hell, and industriously scourging the whole Atlantic coast. Charleston lived in terror of him until Lieutenant Maynard, in a small sloop, laid him alongside in a hammer-and-tongs engagement and cut off the head of Blackbeard to dangle from the bowsprit as a trophy.

Of this rudely adventurous era, it would be hard to find a seaman more typical than the redoubtable Sir William Phips who became the first royal Governor of the Massachusetts Colony in 1692. Born on a frontier farm of the Maine coast while many of the Pilgrim fathers were living, "his faithful mother," wrote Cotton Mather, "had no less than twenty-six children, whereof twenty-one were sons; but equivalent to them all was William, one of the youngest, whom, his father dying, was left young with his mother, and with her he lived,

keeping ye sheep in ye Wilderness until he was eighteen years old." Then he apprenticed himself to a neighboring shipwright who was building sloops and pinnaces and, having learned the trade, set out for Boston. As a ship-carpenter he plied his trade, spent his wages in the taverns of the waterside and there picked up wondrous yarns of the silver-laden galleons of Spain which had shivered their timbers on the reefs of the Bahama Passage or gone down in the hurricanes that beset those southerly seas. Meantime he had married a wealthy widow whose property enabled him to go treasure-hunting on the Spanish main. From his first voyage thither in a small vessel he escaped with his life and barely enough treasure to pay the cost of the expedition.

In no wise daunted he laid his plans to search for a richly laden galleon which was said to have been wrecked half a century before off the coast of Hispaniola. Since his own funds were not sufficient for this exploit, he betook himself to England to enlist the aid of the Government. With bulldog persistence he besieged the court of James II for a whole year, this rough-and-ready New England shipmaster, until he was given a royal frigate for his purpose. He failed to fish up more silver from



the sands but, nothing daunted, he persuaded other patrons to outfit him with a small merchantman, the *James and Mary*, in which he sailed for the coast of Hispaniola. This time he found his galleon and thirty-two tons of silver. "Besides that incredible treasure of plate, thus fetched up from seven or eight fathoms under water, there were vast riches of Gold, and Pearls, and Jewels. . . . All that a Spanish frigot was to be enriched withal."

Up the Thames sailed the lucky little merchantman in the year of 1687, with three hundred thousand pounds sterling as her freightage of treasure. Captain Phips made honest division with his backers and, because men of his integrity were not over plentiful in England after the Restoration, King James knighted him. He sailed home to Boston, "a man of strong and sturdy frame," as Hawthorne fancied him, "whose face had been roughened by northern tempests and blackened by the burning sun of the West Indies. . . . He wears an immense periwig flowing down over his shoulders. . . . His red, rough hands which have done many a good day's work with the hammer and adze are half-covered by the delicate lace ruffles at the wrist." But he carried with him the manners of the forecastle, a man hasty and unlettered but

superbly brave and honest. Even after he had become Governor he thrashed the captain of the *Nonesuch* frigate of the royal navy, and used his fists on the Collector of the Port after cursing him with tremendous gusto. Such behavior in a Governor was too strenuous, and Sir William Phips was summoned to England, where he died while waiting his restoration to office and royal favor. Failing both, he dreamed of still another treasure voyage, "for it was his purpose, upon his dismissal from his Government once more to have gone upon his old Fishing-Trade, upon a mighty shelf of rock and banks of sand that lie where he had informed himself."

## CHAPTER II

### THE PRIVATEERS OF '76

THE wars of England with France and Spain spread turmoil upon the high seas during the greater part of the eighteenth century. Yet with an immense tenacity of purpose, these briny forefathers increased their trade and multiplied their ships in the face of every manner of adversity. The surprising fact is that most of them were not driven ashore to earn their bread. What Daniel Webster said of them at a later day was true from the beginning: "It is not, sir, by protection and bounties, but by unwearied exertion, by extreme economy, by that manly and resolute spirit which relies on itself to protect itself. These causes alone enable American ships still to keep the element and show the flag of their country in distant seas."

What was likely to befall a shipmaster in the turbulent eighteenth century may be inferred from the misfortunes of Captain Michael Driver of

Salem. In 1759 he was in command of the schooner *Three Brothers*, bound to the West Indies on his lawful business. Jogging along with a cargo of fish and lumber, he was taken by a privateer under British colors and sent into Antigua as a prize. Unable to regain either his schooner or his two thousand dollar cargo, he sadly took passage for home. Another owner gave him employment and he set sail in the schooner *Betsy* for Guadaloupe. During this voyage, poor man, he was captured and carried into port by a French privateer. On the suggestion that he might ransom his vessel on payment of four thousand livres, he departed for Boston in hope of finding the money, leaving behind three of his sailors as hostages.

Cash in hand for the ransom, the long-suffering Captain Michael Driver turned southward again, now in the schooner *Mary*, and he flew a flag of truce to indicate his errand. This meant nothing to the ruffian who commanded the English privateer *Revenge*. He violently seized the innocent *Mary* and sent her into New Providence. Here Captain Driver made lawful protest before the authorities, and was set at liberty with vessel and cargo — an act of justice quite unusual in the Admiralty Court of the Bahamas.

Unmolested, the harassed skipper managed to gain Cape François and rescue his three seamen and his schooner in exchange for the ransom money. As he was about to depart homeward bound, a French frigate snatched him and his crew out of their vessel and threw them ashore at Santiago, where for two months they existed as ragged beach-combers until by some judicial twist the schooner was returned to them. They worked her home and presented their long list of grievances to the colonial Government of Massachusetts, which duly forwarded them — and that was the end of it. Three years had been spent in this catalogue of misadventures, and Captain Driver, his owners, and his men were helpless against such intolerable aggression. They and their kind were a prey to every scurvy rascal who misused a privateering commission to fill his own pockets.

Stoutly resolved to sail and trade as they pleased, these undaunted Americans, nevertheless, increased their business on blue water until shortly before the Revolution the New England fleet alone numbered six hundred sail. Its captains felt at home in Surinam and the Canaries. They trimmed their yards in the reaches of the Mediterranean and the North Sea or bargained thriftily in the Levant.

The whalers of Nantucket, in their apple-bowed barks, explored and hunted in distant seas, and the smoke of their try-pots darkened the waters of Baffin Bay, Guinea, and Brazil. It was they who inspired Edmund Burke's familiar eulogy: "No sea but is vexed by their fisheries. No climate that is not a witness to their toils. Neither the perseverance of Holland nor the activity of France, nor the dexterous and firm sagacity of England ever carried this most perilous mode of hardy industry to the extent to which it has been pushed by this recent people — a people who are still, as it were, but in the gristle and not yet hardened into the bone of manhood."

In 1762, seventy-eight whalers cleared from American ports, of which more than half were from Nantucket. Eight years later there were one hundred and twenty-five whalers out of Nantucket which took 14,331 barrels of oil valued at \$358,200. In size these vessels averaged no more than ninety tons, a fishing smack of today, and yet they battered their way half around the watery globe and comfortably supported six thousand people who dwelt on a sandy island unfit for farming and having no other industries. Every Nantucket lad sailed for his "lay" or share of the catch and



aspired to command eventually a whaler of his own.

Whaler, merchantman, and slaver were training a host of incomparable seamen destined to harry the commerce of England under the new-born Stars and Stripes, and now, in 1775, on the brink of actual war, Parliament flung a final provocation and aroused the furious enmity of the fishermen who thronged the Grand Bank. Lord North proposed to forbid the colonies to export fish to those foreign markets in which every seacoast village was vitally concerned, and he also contemplated driving the fishing fleets from their haunts off Newfoundland. This was to rob six thousand sturdy men of a livelihood afloat and to spread ruin among the busy ports, such as Marblehead and Gloucester, from which sailed hundreds of pinks, snows, and schooners. This measure became law notwithstanding the protests of twenty-one peers of the realm who declared: "We dissent because the attempt to coerce by famine the whole body of the inhabitants of great and populous provinces is without example in the history of this, or perhaps, of any civilized nation."

The sailormen bothered their heads very little about taxation without representation but whetted

their anger with grudges more robust. They had been beggared and bullied and shot at from the Bay of Biscay to Barbados, and no sooner was the Continental Congress ready to issue privateering commissions and letters of marque than for them it was up anchor and away to bag a Britisher. Scarcely had a shipmaster signaled his arrival with a deep freight of logwood, molasses, or sugar than he received orders to discharge with all speed and clear his decks for mounting heavier batteries and slinging the hammocks of a hundred eager privateersmen who had signed articles in the tavern rendezvous. The timbered warehouses were filled with long-toms and nine-pounders, muskets, blunderbusses, pistols, cutlasses, boarding-pikes, hand grenades, tomahawks, grape, canister, and double-headed shot.

In the narrow, gabled streets of Salem, Boston, New York, and Baltimore, crowds trooped after the fifes and drums with a strapping recruiting officer to enroll "all gentlemen seamen and able-bodied landmen who had a mind to distinguish themselves in the glorious cause of their country and make their fortunes." Many a ship's company was mustered between noon and sunset, including men who had served in armed merchantmen

and who in times of nominal peace had fought the marauders of Europe or whipped the corsairs of Barbary in the Strait of Gibraltar. Never was a race of seamen so admirably fitted for the daring trade of privateering as the crews of these tall sloops, topsail schooners, and smart square-riggers, their sides checkered with gun-ports, and ready to drive to sea like hawks.

In some instances the assurance of these hardy men was both absurd and sublime. Ramshackle boats with twenty or thirty men aboard, mounting one or two old guns, sallied out in the expectation of gold and glory, only to be captured by the first British cruiser that chanced to sight them. A few even sailed with no cannon at all, confident of taking them out of the first prize overhauled by laying alongside — and so in some cases they actually did.

The privateersmen of the Revolution played a larger part in winning the war than has been commonly recognized. This fact, however, was clearly perceived by Englishmen of that era, as the London *Spectator* candidly admitted: "The books at Lloyds will recount it, and the rate of assurances at that time will prove what their diminutive strength was able to effect in the face of our navy,

and that when nearly one hundred pennants were flying on our coast. Were we able to prevent their going in and out, or stop them from taking our trade and our storeships even in sight of our garrisons? Besides, were they not in the English and Irish Channels, picking up our homeward bound trade, sending their prizes into French and Spanish ports to the great terror of our merchants and ship-owners?"

The naval forces of the Thirteen Colonies were pitifully feeble in comparison with the mighty fleets of the enemy whose flaming broadsides upheld the ancient doctrine that "the Monarchs of Great Britain have a peculiar and Sovereign authority upon the Ocean . . . from the Laws of God and of Nature, besides an uninterrupted Fruition of it for so many Ages past as that its Beginnings cannot be traced out."<sup>1</sup>

In 1776 only thirty-one Continental cruisers of all classes were in commission, and this number was swiftly diminished by capture and blockade until in 1782 no more than seven ships flew the flag of the American Navy. On the other hand, at the close of 1777, one hundred and seventy-four private armed vessels had been commissioned, mounting

<sup>1</sup> *The Seaman's Vade-Mecum*. London, 1744.

two thousand guns and carrying nine thousand men. During this brief period of the war they took as prizes 733 British merchantmen and inflicted losses of more than two million pounds sterling. Over ten thousand seamen were made prisoners at a time when England sorely needed them for drafting into her navy. To lose them was a far more serious matter than for General Washington to capture as many Hessian mercenaries who could be replaced by purchase.

In some respects privateering as waged a century and more ago was a sordid, unlovely business, the ruling motive being rather a greed of gain than an ardent love of country. Shares in lucky ships were bought and sold in the gambling spirit of a stock exchange. Fortunes were won and lost regardless of the public service. It became almost impossible to recruit men for the navy because they preferred the chance of booty in a privateer. For instance, the State of Massachusetts bought a twenty-gun ship, the *Protector*, as a contribution to the naval strength, and one of her crew, Ebenezer Fox, wrote of the effort to enlist sufficient men: "The recruiting business went on slowly, however, but at length upwards of three hundred men were carried, dragged, and driven abroad; of all ages, kinds,



and descriptions; in all the various stages of intoxication from that of sober tipsiness to beastly drunkenness; with the uproar and clamor that may be more easily imagined than described. Such a motley group has never been seen since Falstaff's ragged regiment paraded the streets of Coventry."

There was nothing of glory to boast of in fetching into port some little Nova Scotia coasting schooner with a cargo of deals and potatoes, whose master was also the owner and who lost the savings of a lifetime because he lacked the men and guns to defend his property against spoliation. The war was no concern of his, and he was the victim of a system now obsolete among civilized nations, a relic of a barbarous and piratical age whose spirit has been revived and gloried in recently only by the Government of the German Empire. The chief fault of the privateersman was that he sailed and fought for his own gain, but he was never guilty of sinking ships with passengers and crew aboard, and very often he played the gentleman in gallant style. Nothing could have seemed to him more abhorrent and incredible than a kind of warfare which should drown women and children because they had embarked under an enemy's flag.



Extraordinary as were the successes of the Yankee privateers, it was a game of give-and-take, a weapon which cut both ways, and the temptation is to extol their audacious achievements while glossing over the heavy losses which their own merchant marine suffered. The weakness of privateering was that it was wholly offensive and could not, like a strong navy, protect its own commerce from depredation. While the Americans were capturing over seven hundred British vessels during the first two years of the war, as many as nine hundred American ships were taken or sunk by the enemy, a rate of destruction which fairly swept the Stars and Stripes from the tracks of ocean commerce. As prizes these vessels were sold at Liverpool and London for an average amount of two thousand pounds each and the loss to the American owners was, of course, ever so much larger.

The fact remains, nevertheless — and it is a brilliant page of history to recall — that in an inchoate nation without a navy, with blockading squadrons sealing most of its ports, with ragged armies on land which retreated oftener than they fought, private armed ships dealt the maritime prestige of Great Britain a far deadlier blow than

the Dutch, French, and Spanish were able to inflict. In England, there resulted actual distress, even lack of food, because these intrepid seamen could not be driven away from her own coasts and continued to snatch their prizes from under the guns of British forts and fleets. The plight of the West India Colonies was even worse, as witness this letter from a merchant of Grenada: "We are happy if we can get anything for money by reason of the quantity of vessels taken by the Americans. A fleet of vessels came from Ireland a few days ago. From sixty vessels that departed from Ireland not above twenty-five arrived in this and neighboring islands, the others, it is thought, being all taken by American privateers. God knows, if this American war continues much longer, we shall all die of hunger."

On both sides, by far the greater number of captures was made during the earlier period of the war which cleared the seas of the smaller, slower, and unarmed vessels. As the war progressed and the profits flowed in, swifter and larger ships were built for the special business of privateering until the game resembled actual naval warfare. Whereas, at first, craft of ten guns with forty or fifty men had been considered adequate for the service,

three or four years later ships were afloat with a score of heavy cannon and a trained crew of a hundred and fifty or two hundred men, ready to engage a sloop of war or to stand up to the enemy's largest privateers. In those days single ship actions, now almost forgotten in naval tactics, were fought with illustrious skill and courage, and commanders won victories worthy of comparison with deeds distinguished in the annals of the American Navy.

## CHAPTER III

### OUT CUTLASES AND BOARD!

SALEM was the foremost privateering port of the Revolution, and from this pleasant harbor, long since deserted by ships and sailormen, there filled away past Cape Ann one hundred and fifty-eight vessels of all sizes to scan the horizon for British topsails. They accounted for four hundred prizes, or half the whole number to the credit of American arms afloat. This preëminence was due partly to freedom from a close blockade and partly to a seafaring population which was born and bred to its trade and knew no other. Besides the crews of Salem merchantmen, privateering enlisted the idle fishermen of ports nearby and the mariners of Boston whose commerce had been snuffed out by the British occupation. Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston sent some splendid armed ships to sea but not with the impetuous rush nor in anything like the numbers

enrolled by this gray old town whose fame was unique.

For the most part, the records of all these brave ships and the thousands of men who sailed and sweated and fought in them are dim and scanty, no more than routine entries in dusty log-books which read like this: "Filled away in pursuit of a second sail in the N. W. At 4.30 she hoisted English colors and commenced firing her stern guns. At 5.20 took in the steering sails, at the same time she fired a broadside. We opened a fire from our larboard battery and at 5.30 she struck her colors. Got out the boats and boarded her. She proved to be the British brig *Acorn* from Liverpool to Rio Janeiro, mounting fourteen cannon."<sup>1</sup> But now and then one finds in these old sea-journals an entry more intimate and human, such as the complaint of the master of the privateer *Scorpion*, cruising in 1778 and never a prize in sight. "This Book I made to keep the Accounts of my Voyage but God knows beste what that will be, for I am at this time very Impashent but I hope soon there will be a Change to ease my Trubled Mind. On this Day I was Chaced by Two Ships of War which

<sup>1</sup> From the manuscript collections of the Essex Institute, Salem, Mass.

I tuck to be Enemies, but coming on thick Weather I have lost site of them and so conclude myself escaped which is a small good Fortune in the midste of my Discouragements.”<sup>1</sup> A burst of gusty laughter still echoes along the crowded deck of the letter-of-marque schooner *Success*, whose master, Captain Philip Thrash, inserted this diverting comment in his humdrum record of the day’s work: “At one half past 8 discovered a sail ahead. Tacked ship. At 9 tacked ship again and past just to Leeward of the Sail which appeared to be a damn’d Comical Boat, by G—d.”<sup>1</sup>

There are a few figures of the time and place which stand out, full-length, in vivid colors against a background that satisfies the desire of romance and thrillingly conveys the spirit of the time and the place. Such a one was Captain Jonathan Haraden, Salem privateersman, who captured one thousand British cannon afloat and is worthy to be ranked as one of the ablest sea-fighters of his generation. He was a merchant mariner, a master at the outbreak of the Revolution, who had followed the sea since boyhood. But it was more to his taste to command the Salem ship *General*

<sup>1</sup> From the manuscript collections of the Essex Institute, Salem, Mass.



*Pickering* of 180 tons which was fitted out under a letter of marque in the spring of 1780. She carried fourteen six-pounders and forty-five men and boys, nothing very formidable, when Captain Haraden sailed for Bilbao with a cargo of sugar. During the voyage, before his crew had been hammered into shape, he beat off a British privateer of twenty guns and safely tacked into the Bay of Biscay.

There he sighted another hostile privateer, the *Golden Eagle*, larger than his own ship. Instead of shifting his course to avoid her, Haraden clapped on sail and steered alongside after nightfall, roaring through his trumpet: "What ship is this? An American frigate, sir. Strike, or I'll sink you with a broadside."

Dazed by this unexpected summons in the gloom, the master of the *Golden Eagle* promptly surrendered, and a prize crew was thrown aboard with orders to follow the *Pickering* into Bilbao. While just outside that Spanish harbor, a strange sail was descried and again Jonathan Haraden cleared for action. The vessel turned out to be the *Achilles*, one of the most powerful privateers out of London, with forty guns and a hundred and fifty men, or almost thrice the fighting strength of the little

*Pickering*. She was, in fact, more like a sloop of war. Before Captain Haraden could haul within gunshot to protect his prize, it had been recaptured by the *Achilles*, which then maneuvered to engage the *Pickering*.

Darkness intervened, but Jonathan Haraden had no idea of escaping under cover of it. He was waiting for the morning breeze and a chance to fight it out to a finish. He was a handsome man with an air of serene composure and a touch of the theatrical such as Nelson displayed in his great moments. Having prepared his ship for battle, he slept soundly until dawn and then dressed with fastidious care to stroll on deck, where he beheld the *Achilles* bearing down on him with her crew at quarters.

His own men were clustered behind their open ports, matches lighted, tackles and breechings cast off, crowbars, handspikes, and sponge-staves in place, gunners stripped to the waist, powder-boys ready for the word like sprinters on the mark. Forty-five of them against a hundred and fifty, and Captain Haraden, debonair, unruffled, walking to and fro with a leisurely demeanor, remarking that although the *Achilles* appeared to be superior in force, "he had no doubt they would beat her if

they were firm and steady and did not throw away their fire."

It was, indeed, a memorable sea-picture, the sturdy *Pickering* riding deep with her burden of sugar and seeming smaller than she really was, the *Achilles* towering like a frigate, and all Bilbao turned out to watch the duel, shore and headlands crowded with spectators, the blue harbor-mouth gay with an immense flotilla of fishing-boats and pleasure craft. The stake for which Haraden fought was to retake the *Golden Eagle* prize and to gain his port. His seamanship was flawless. Vastly outnumbered if it should come to boarding, he handled his vessel so as to avoid the *Achilles* while he poured the broadsides into her. After two hours the London privateer emerged from the smoke which had obscured the combat and put out to sea in flight, hulled through and through, while a farewell flight of crowbars, with which the guns of the *Pickering* had been crammed to the muzzle, ripped through her sails and rigging.

Haraden hoisted canvas and drove in chase, but the *Achilles* had the heels of him "with a mainsail as large as a ship of the line," and reluctantly he wore ship and, with the *Golden Eagle* again in his possession, he sailed to an anchorage in Bilbao

harbor. The Spanish populace welcomed him with tremendous enthusiasm. He was carried through the streets in a holiday procession and was the hero of banquets and public receptions.

Such a man was bound to be the idol of his sailors and one of them quite plausibly related that "so great was the confidence he inspired that if he but looked at a sail through his glass and told the helmsman to steer for her, the observation went round, 'If she is an enemy, she is ours.'"

It was in this same *General Pickering*, no longer sugar-laden but in cruising trim, that Jonathan Haraden accomplished a feat which Paul Jones might have been proud to claim. There lifted above the sky-line three armed merchantmen sailing in company from Halifax to New York, a brig of fourteen guns, a ship of sixteen guns, a sloop of twelve guns. When they flew signals and formed in line, the ship alone appeared to outmatch the *Pickering*, but Haraden, in that lordly manner of his, assured his men that "he had no doubt whatever that if they would do their duty he would quickly capture the three vessels." Here was performance very much out of the ordinary, naval strategy of an exceptionally high order, and yet it is dismissed by the only witness who took the

trouble to mention it in these few, casual words: "This he did with great ease by going alongside of each of them, one after the other."

One more story of this master sea-rover of the Revolution, sailor and gentleman, who served his country so much more brilliantly than many a landsman lauded in the written histories of the war. While in the *Pickering* he attacked a heavily armed royal mail packet bound to England from the West Indies, one of the largest merchant vessels of her day and equipped to defend herself against privateers. A tough antagonist and a hard nut to crack! They battered each other like two pugilists for four hours and even then the decision was still in the balance. Then Haraden sheered off to mend his damaged gear and splintered hull before closing in again.

He then discovered that all his powder had been shot away excepting one last charge. Instead of calling it a drawn battle, he rammed home this last shot in the locker, and ran down to windward of the packet, so close that he could shout across to the other quarter-deck: "I will give you five minutes to haul down your colors. If they are not down at the end of that time, I will fire into you and sink you, so help me God."



It was the bluff magnificent — courage cold-blooded and calculating. The adversary was still unbeaten. Haraden stood with watch in hand and sonorously counted off the minutes. It was the stronger will and not the heavier metal that won the day. To be shattered by fresh broadsides at pistol-range was too much for the nerves of the gallant English skipper whose decks were already like a slaughterhouse. One by one, Haraden shouted the minutes and his gunners blew their matches. At “four” the red ensign came fluttering down and the mail packet was a prize of war.

Another merchant seaman of this muster-roll of patriots was Silas Talbot, who took to salt water as a cabin boy at the age of twelve and was a prosperous shipmaster at twenty-one with savings invested in a house of his own in Providence. Enlisting under Washington, he was made a captain of infantry and was soon promoted, but he was restless ashore and glad to obtain an odd assignment. As Colonel Talbot he selected sixty infantry volunteers, most of them seamen by trade, and led them aboard the small sloop *Argo* in May, 1779, to punish the New York Tories who were equipping privateers against their own countrymen and working great mischief in Long Island Sound. So



serious was the situation that General Gates found it almost impossible to obtain food supplies for the northern department of the Continental army.

Silas Talbot and his nautical infantrymen promptly fell in with the New York privateer *Lively*, a fair match for him, and as promptly sent her into port. He then ran offshore and picked up and carried into Boston two English privateers headed for New York with large cargoes of merchandise from the West Indies. But he was particularly anxious to square accounts with a renegade Captain Hazard who made Newport his base and had captured many American vessels with the stout brig *King George*, using her for "the base purpose of plundering his old neighbors and friends."

On his second cruise in the *Argo*, young Silas Talbot encountered the perfidious *King George* to the southward of Long Island and riddled her with one broadside after another, first hailing Captain Hazard by name and cursing him in double-shotted phrases for the traitorous swab that he was. Then the seagoing infantry scrambled over the bulwarks and tumbled the Tories down their own hatches without losing a man. A prize crew with the humiliated *King George* made for New London, where there was much cheering in the port, and

“even the women, both young and old, expressed the greatest joy.”

With no very heavy fighting, Talbot had captured five vessels and was keen to show what his crew could do against mettlesome foemen. He found them at last well out to sea in a large ship which seemed eager to engage him. Only a few hundred feet apart through a long afternoon, they briskly and cheerily belabored each other with grape and solid shot. Talbot's speaking-trumpet was shot out of his hand, the tails of his coat were shorn off, and all the officers and men stationed with him on the quarter-deck were killed or wounded.

His crew reported that the *Argo* was in a sinking condition, with the water flooding the gun-deck, but he told them to lower a man or two in the bight of a line and they pluckily plugged the holes from overside. There was a lusty huzza when the Englishman's mainmast crashed to the deck and this finished the affair. Silas Talbot found that he had trounced the privateer *Dragon*, of twice his own tonnage and with the advantage in both guns and men.

While his crew was patching the *Argo* and pumping the water from her hold, the lookout yelled

that another sail was making for them. Without hesitation Talbot somehow got this absurdly impudent one-masted craft of his under way and told those of his sixty men who survived to prepare for a second tussle. Fortunately another Yankee privateer joined the chase and together they subdued the armed brig *Hannah*. When the *Argo* safely convoyed the two prizes into New Bedford, "all who beheld her were astonished that a vessel of her diminutive size could suffer so much and yet get safely to port."

Men fought and slew each other in those rude and distant days with a certain courtesy, with a fine, punctilious regard for the etiquette of the bloody game. There was the Scotch skipper of the *Betsy*, a privateer, whom Silas Talbot hailed as follows, before they opened fire:

"You must now haul down those British colors, my friend."

"Notwithstanding I find you an enemy, as I suspected," was the dignified reply, "yet, sir, I shall let them hang a little bit longer, — with your permission, — so fire away, Flanagan."

During another of her cruises the *Argo* pursued an artfully disguised ship of the line which could have blown her to kingdom come with

a broadside of thirty guns. The little *Argo* was actually becalmed within short range, but her company got out the sweeps and rowed her some distance before darkness and a favoring slant of wind carried them clear. In the summer of 1780, Captain Silas Talbot, again a mariner by title, was given the private cruiser *General Washington* with one hundred and twenty men, but he was less fortunate with her than when afloat in the tiny *Argo* with his sixty Continentals. Off Sandy Hook he ran into the British fleet under Admiral Arbuthnot and, being outsailed in a gale of wind, he was forced to lower his flag to the great seventy-four *Culloden*. After a year in English prisons he was released and made his way home, serving no more in the war but having the honor to command the immortal frigate *Constitution* in 1799 as a captain in the American Navy.

In several notable instances the privateersmen tried conclusions with ships that flew the royal ensign, and got the better of them. The hero of an uncommonly brilliant action of this sort was Captain George Geddes of Philadelphia, who was entrusted with the *Congress*, a noble privateer of twenty-four guns and two hundred men. Several of the smaller British cruisers had been sending

parties ashore to plunder estates along the southern shores, and one of them, the sloop of war *Savage*, had even raided Washington's home at Mount Vernon. Later she shifted to the coast of Georgia in quest of loot and was unlucky enough to fall athwart Captain Geddes in the *Congress*.

The privateer was the more formidable ship and faster on the wind, forcing Captain Sterling of the *Savage* to accept the challenge. Disabled aloft very early in the fight, Captain Geddes was unable to choose his position, for which reason they literally battled hand-to-hand, hulls grinding against each other, the gunners scorched by the flashes of the cannon in the ports of the opposing ship, with scarcely room to ply the rammers, and the sailors throwing missiles from the decks, hand grenades, cold shot, scraps of iron, belaying-pins.

As the vessels lay interlocked, the *Savage* was partly dismasted and Captain Geddes, leaping upon the forecastle head, told the boarders to follow him. Before they could swing their cutlasses and dash over the hammock-nettings, the British boatswain waved his cap and yelled that the *Savage* had surrendered. Captain Sterling was dead, eight others were killed, and twenty-four wounded. The American loss was about the



same. Captain Geddes, however, was unable to save his prize because a British frigate swooped down and took them both into Charleston.

When peace came in 1783, it was independence dearly bought by land and sea, and no small part of the price was the loss of a thousand merchant ships which would see their home ports no more. Other misfortunes added to the toll of destruction. The great fishing fleets which had been the chief occupation of coastwise New England were almost obliterated and their crews were scattered. Many of the men had changed their allegiance and were sailing out of Halifax, and others were impressed into British men-of-war or returned broken in health from long confinement in British prisons. The ocean was empty of the stanch schooners which had raced home with lee rails awash to cheer waiting wives and sweethearts.

The fate of Nantucket and its whalers was even more tragic. This colony on its lonely island amid the shoals was helpless against raids by sea, and its ships and storehouses were destroyed without mercy. Many vessels in distant waters were captured before they were even aware that a state of war existed. Of a fleet numbering a hundred and fifty sail, one hundred and thirty-four were



taken by the enemy and Nantucket whaling suffered almost total extinction. These seamen, thus robbed of their livelihood, fought nobly for their country's cause. Theirs was not the breed to sulk or whine in port. Twelve hundred of them were killed or made prisoners during the Revolution. They were to be found in the Army and Navy and behind the guns of privateers. There were twenty-five Nantucket whalers in the crew of the *Ranger* when Paul Jones steered her across the Atlantic on that famous cruise which inspired the old fore-castle song that begins:

'Tis of the gallant Yankee ship  
That flew the Stripes and Stars,  
And the whistling wind from the west nor'west  
Blew through her pitch pine spars.  
With her starboard tacks aboard, my boys,  
She hung upon the gale.  
On an autumn night we raised the light  
Off the Old Head of Kinsale.

Pitiful as was the situation of Nantucket, with its only industry wiped out and two hundred widows among the eight hundred families left on the island, the aftermath of war seemed almost as ruinous along the whole Atlantic coast. More ships could be built and there were thousands of adventurous sailors to man them, but where were

the markets for the products of the farms and mills and plantations? The ports of Europe had been so long closed to American shipping that little demand was left for American goods. To the Government of England the people of the Republic were no longer fellow-countrymen but foreigners. As such they were subject to the Navigation Acts, and no cargoes could be sent to that kingdom unless in British vessels. The flourishing trade with the West Indies was made impossible for the same reason, a special Order in Council aiming at one fell stroke to "put an end to the building and increase of American vessels" and to finish the careers of three hundred West India-men already afloat. In the islands themselves the results were appalling. Fifteen thousand slaves died of starvation because the American traders were compelled to cease bringing them dried fish and corn during seasons in which their own crops were destroyed by hurricanes.

In 1776, one-third of the seagoing merchant marine of Great Britain had been bought or built to order in America because lumber was cheaper and wages were lower. This lucrative business was killed by a law which denied Englishmen the privilege of purchasing ships built in American yards.

So narrow and bitter was this commercial enmity, so ardent this desire to banish the Stars and Stripes from blue water, that Lord Sheffield in 1784 advised Parliament that the pirates of Algiers and Tripoli really benefited English commerce by preying on the shipping of weaker nations. "It is not probable that the American States will have a very free trade in the Mediterranean," said he. "It will not be to the interest of any of the great maritime Powers to protect them from the Barbary States. If they know their interests, they will not encourage the Americans to be carriers. That the Barbary States are advantageous to maritime Powers is certain."

Denied the normal ebb and flow of trade and commerce and with the imports from England far exceeding the value of the merchandise exported thence, the United States, already impoverished, was drained of its money, and a currency of dollars, guineas, joes, and moidores grew scarcer day by day. There was no help in a government which consisted of States united only in name. Congress comprised a handful of respectable gentlemen who had little power and less responsibility, quarreling among themselves for lack of better employment. Retaliation against England by means of legislation

was utterly impossible. Each State looked after its commerce in its own peculiar fashion and the devil might take the hindmost. Their rivalries and jealousies were like those of petty kingdoms. If one State should close her ports to English ships, the others would welcome them in order to divert the trade, with no feeling of national pride or federal coöperation.

The Articles of Confederation had empowered Congress to make treaties of commerce, but only such as did not restrain the legislative power of any State from laying imposts and regulating exports and imports. If a foreign power imposed heavy duties upon American shipping, it was for the individual States and not for Congress to say whether the vessels of the offending nation should be allowed free entrance to the ports of the United States. It was folly to suppose, ran the common opinion, that if South Carolina should bar her ports to Spain because rice and indigo were excluded from the Spanish colonies, New Hampshire, which furnished masts and lumber for the Spanish Navy, ought to do the same. The idea of turning the whole matter over to Congress was considered preposterous by many intelligent Americans.

In these thirteen States were nearly three and a

quarter million people hemmed in a long and narrow strip between the sea and an unexplored wilderness in which the Indians were an ever present peril. The Southern States, including Maryland, prosperous agricultural regions, contained almost one-half the English-speaking population of America. As colonies, they had found the Old World eager for their rice, tobacco, indigo, and tar, and slavery was the means of labor so firmly established that one-fifth of the inhabitants were black. By contrast, the Northern States were still concerned with commerce as the very lifeblood of their existence. New England had not dreamed of the millions of spindles which should hum on the banks of her rivers and lure her young men and women from the farms to the clamorous factory towns. The city of New York had not yet outgrown its traffic in furs and its magnificent commercial destiny was still unrevealed. It was a considerable seaport but not yet a gateway. From Sandy Hook, however, to the stormy headlands of Maine, it was a matter of life and death that ships should freely come and go with cargoes to exchange. All other resources were trifling in comparison.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FAMOUS DAYS OF SALEM PORT

IN such compelling circumstances as these, necessity became the mother of achievement. There is nothing finer in American history than the dogged fortitude and high-hearted endeavor with which the merchant seamen returned to their work after the Revolution and sought and found new markets for their wares. It was then that Salem played that conspicuous part which was, for a generation, to overshadow the activities of all other American seaports. Six thousand privateersmen had signed articles in her taverns, as many as the total population of the town, and they filled it with a spirit of enterprise and daring. Not for them the stupid monotony of voyages coastwise if more hazardous ventures beckoned and there were havens and islands unvexed by trade where bold men might win profit and perhaps fight for life and cargo.

Now there dwelt in Salem one of the great men



of his time, Elias Hasket Derby, the first American millionaire, and very much more than this. He was a shipping merchant with a vision and with the hard-headed sagacity to make his dreams come true. His was a notable seafaring family, to begin with. His father, Captain Richard Derby, born in 1712, had dispatched his small vessels to the West Indies and Virginia and with the returns from these voyages he had loaded assorted cargoes for Spain and Madeira and had the proceeds remitted in bills of exchange to London or in wine, salt, fruit, oil, lead, and handkerchiefs to America. Richard Derby's vessels had eluded or banged away at the privateers during the French War from 1756 to 1763, mounting from eight to twelve guns, "with four cannon below decks for close quarters." Of such a temper was this old sea-dog who led the militia and defiantly halted General Gage's regulars at the North River bridge in Salem, two full months before the skirmish at Lexington. Eight of the nineteen cannon which it was proposed to seize from the patriots had been taken from the ships of Captain Richard Derby and stored in his warehouse for the use of the Provincial Congress.

It was Richard's son, Captain John Derby, who

carried to England in the swift schooner *Quero* the first news of the affair at Lexington, ahead of the King's messenger. A sensational arrival, if ever there was one! This Salem shipmaster, cracking on sail like a proper son of his sire, making the passage in twenty-nine days and handsomely beating the lubberly Royal Express Packet *Sukey* which left Boston four days sooner, and startling the British nation with the tidings which meant the loss of an American empire! A singular coincidence was that this same Captain John Derby should have been the first mariner to inform the United States that peace had come, when he arrived from France in 1783 with the message that a treaty had been signed.

Elias Hasket Derby was another son of Richard. When his manifold energies were crippled by the war, he diverted his ability and abundant resources into privateering. He was interested in at least eighty of the privateers out of Salem, invariably subscribing for such shares as might not be taken up by his fellow-townsmen. He soon perceived that many of these craft were wretchedly unfit for the purpose and were easily captured or wrecked. It was characteristic of his genius that he should establish shipyards of his own, turn his attention

to naval architecture, and begin to build a class of vessels vastly superior in size, model, and speed to any previously launched in the colonies. They were designed to meet the small cruiser of the British Navy on even terms and were remarkably successful, both in enriching their owner and in defying the enemy.

At the end of the war Elias Hasket Derby discovered that these fine ships were too large and costly to ply up and down the coast. Instead of bewailing his hard lot, he resolved to send them to the other side of the globe. At a time when the British and the Dutch East India companies insolently claimed a monopoly of the trade of the Orient, when American merchant seamen had never ventured beyond the two Atlantics, this was a conception which made of commerce a surpassing romance and heralded the golden era of the nation's life upon the sea.

His *Grand Turk* of three hundred tons was promptly fitted out for a pioneering voyage as far as the Cape of Good Hope. Salem knew her as "the great ship" and yet her hull was not quite one hundred feet long. Safely Captain Jonathan Ingersoll took her out over the long road, his navigating equipment consisting of a few erroneous

maps and charts, a sextant, and Guthrie's Geographical Grammar. In Table Bay he sold his cargo of provisions and then visited the coast of Guinea to dispose of his rum for ivory and gold-dust but brought not a single slave back, Mr. Derby having declared that "he would rather sink the whole capital employed than directly or indirectly be concerned in so infamous a trade" — an unusual point of view for a shipping merchant of New England in 1784!

Derby ships were first to go to Mauritius, then called the Isle of France, first at Calcutta, and among the earliest to swing at anchor off Canton. When Elias Hasket Derby decided to invade this rich East India commerce, he sent his eldest son, Elias Hasket, Jr., to England and the Continent after a course at Harvard. The young man became a linguist and made a thorough study of English and French methods of trade. Having laid this foundation for the venture, the son was now sent to India, where he lived for three years in the interests of his house, building up a trade almost fabulously profitable.

How fortunes were won in those stirring days may be discerned from the record of young Derby's ventures while in the Orient. In 1788 the proceeds

of one cargo enabled him to buy a ship and a brigantine in the Isle of France. These two vessels he sent to Bombay to load with cotton. Two other ships of his fleet, the *Astrea* and *Light Horse*, were filled at Calcutta and Rangoon and ordered to Salem. It was found, when the profits of these transactions were reckoned, that the little squadron had earned \$100,000 above all outlay.

To carry on such a business as this enlisted many men and industries. While the larger ships were making their distant voyages, the brigs and schooners were gathering cargoes for them, crossing to Gothenburg and St. Petersburg for iron, duck, and hemp, to France, Spain, and Madeira for wine and lead, to the French West Indies for molasses to be turned into rum, to New York, Philadelphia, and Richmond for flour, provisions, and tobacco. These shipments were assembled in the warehouses on Derby Wharf and paid for the teas, coffees, pepper, muslin, silks, and ivory which the ships from the Far East were fetching home. In fourteen years the Derby ships made one hundred and twenty-five voyages to Europe and far eastern ports and out of the thirty-five vessels engaged only one was lost at sea.

It was in 1785 when the *Grand Turk*, on a second



voyage, brought back a cargo of silks, teas, and nankeens from Batavia and China, that *The Independent Chronicle* of London, unconsciously humorous, was moved to affirm that "the Americans have given up all thought of a China trade which can never be carried on to advantage without some settlement in the East Indies."

As soon as these new sea-trails had been furrowed by the keels of Elias Hasket Derby, other Salem merchants were quick to follow in a rivalry which left no sea unexplored for virgin markets and which ransacked every nook and corner of barbarism which had a shore. Vessels slipped their cables and sailed away by night for some secret destination with whose savage potentate trade relations had been established. It might be Captain Jonathan Carnes who, while at the port of Bencoolen in 1793, heard that pepper grew wild on the northern coast of Sumatra. He whispered the word to the Salem owner, who sent him back in the schooner *Rajah* with only four guns and ten men. Eighteen months later, Jonathan Carnes returned to Salem with a cargo of pepper in bulk, the first direct importation, and cleared seven hundred per cent on the voyage. When he made ready to go again, keeping his business strictly



to himself, other owners tracked him clear to Bencoolen, but there he vanished in the *Rajah*, and his secret with him, until he reappeared with another precious cargo of pepper. When, at length, he shared this trade with other vessels, it meant that Salem controlled the pepper market of Sumatra and for many years supplied a large part of the world's demand.

And so it happened that in the spicy warehouses that overlooked Salem Harbor there came to be stored hemp from Luzon, gum copal from Zanzibar, palm oil from Africa, coffee from Arabia, tallow from Madagascar, whale oil from the Antarctic, hides and wool from the Rio de la Plata, nutmeg and cloves from Malaysia. Such merchandise had been bought or bartered for by shipmasters who were much more than mere navigators. They had to be shrewd merchants on their own accounts, for the success or failure of a voyage was mostly in their hands. Carefully trained and highly intelligent men, they attained command in the early twenties and were able to retire, after a few years more afloat, to own ships and exchange the quarter-deck for the counting-room, and the cabin for the solid mansion and lawn on Derby Street. Every opportunity, indeed, was offered them to advance

their own fortunes. They sailed not for wages but for handsome commissions and privileges — in the Derby ships, five per cent of a cargo outward bound, two and a half per cent of the freightage home, five per cent profit on goods bought and sold between foreign ports, and five per cent of the cargo space for their own use.

Such was the system which persuaded the pick and flower of young American manhood to choose the sea as the most advantageous career possible. There was the Crowninshield family, for example, with five brothers all in command of ships before they were old enough to vote and at one time all five away from Salem, each in his own vessel and three of them in the East India trade. "When little boys," to quote from the memoirs of Benjamin Crowninshield, "they were all sent to a common school and about their eleventh year began their first particular study which should develop them as sailors and ship captains. These boys studied their navigation as little chaps of twelve years old and were required to thoroughly master the subject before being sent to sea. . . . As soon as the art of navigation was mastered, the youngsters were sent to sea, sometimes as common sailors but commonly as ship's clerks, in

which position they were able to learn everything about the management of a ship without actually being a common sailor.”

This was the practice in families of solid station and social rank, for to be a shipmaster was to follow the profession of a gentleman. Yet the bright lad who entered by way of the forecastle also played for high stakes. Soon promoted to the berth of mate, he was granted cargo space for his own adventures in merchandise and a share of the profits. In these days the youth of twenty-one is likely to be a college undergraduate, rated too callow and unfit to be intrusted with the smallest business responsibilities and tolerantly regarded as unable to take care of himself. It provokes both a smile and a glow of pride, therefore, to recall those seasoned striplings and what they did.

No unusual instance was that of Nathaniel Silsbee, later United States Senator from Massachusetts, who took command of the new ship *Benjamin* in the year 1792, laden with a costly cargo from Salem for the Cape of Good Hope and India, “with such instructions,” says he, “as left the management of the voyage very much to my own discretion. Neither myself nor the chief mate, Mr. Charles Derby, had attained the age of

twenty-one years when we left home. I was not then twenty." This reminded him to speak of his own family. Of the three Silsbee brothers, "each of us obtained the command of vessels and the consignment of their cargoes before attaining the age of twenty years, viz., myself at the age of eighteen and a half, my brother William at nineteen and a half, and my brother Zachariah before he was twenty years old. Each and all of us left off going to sea before reaching the age of twenty-nine years."

How resourcefully these children of the sea could handle affairs was shown in this voyage of the *Benjamin*. While in the Indian Ocean young Silsbee fell in with a frigate which gave him news of the beginning of war between England and France. He shifted his course for Mauritius and there sold the cargo for a dazzling price in paper dollars, which he turned into Spanish silver. An embargo detained him for six months, during which this currency increased to three times the value of the paper money. He gave up the voyage to Calcutta, sold the Spanish dollars and loaded with coffee and spices for Salem. At the Cape of Good Hope, however, he discovered that he could earn a pretty penny by sending his cargo home in

other ships and loading the *Benjamin* again for Mauritius. When, at length, he arrived in Salem harbor, after nineteen months away, his enterprises had reaped a hundred per cent for Elias Hasket Derby and his own share was the snug little fortune of four thousand dollars. Part of this he, of course, invested at sea, and at twenty-two he was part owner of the *Betsy*, East Indiaman, and on the road to independence.

As second mate in the *Benjamin* had sailed Richard Cleveland, another matured mariner of nineteen, who crowded into one life an Odyssey of adventure noteworthy even in that era and who had the knack of writing about it with rare skill and spirit. In 1797, when twenty-three years old, he was master of the bark *Enterprise* bound from Salem to Mocha for coffee. The voyage was abandoned at Havre and he sent the mate home with the ship, deciding to remain abroad and gamble for himself with the chances of the sea. In France he bought on credit a "cutter-sloop" of forty-three tons, no larger than the yachts whose owners think it venturesome to take them off soundings in summer cruises. In this little box of a craft he planned to carry a cargo of merchandise to the Cape of Good Hope and thence to Mauritius.



His crew included two men, a black cook, and a brace of boys who were hastily shipped at Havre. "Fortunately they were all so much in debt as not to want any time to spend their advance, but were ready at the instant, and with this motley crew, (who, for aught I knew, were robbers or pirates) I put to sea." The only sailor of the lot was a Nantucket lad who was made mate and had to be taught the rudiments of navigation while at sea. Of the others he had this to say, in his light-hearted manner:

The first of my fore-mast hands is a great, surly, crabbed, raw-boned, ignorant Prussian who is so timid aloft that the mate has frequently been obliged to do his duty there. I believe him to be more of a soldier than a sailor, though he has often assured me that he has been a boatswain's mate of a Dutch Indiaman, which I do not believe as he hardly knows how to put two ends of a rope together. . . . My cook . . . a good-natured negro and a tolerable cook, so unused to a vessel that in the smoothest weather he cannot walk fore and aft without holding onto something with both hands. This fear proceeds from the fact that he is so tall and slim that if he should get a cant it might be fatal to him. I did not think America could furnish such a specimen of the negro race . . . nor did I ever see such a simpleton. It is impossible to teach him anything and . . . he can hardly tell the main-halliards from the mainstay.

Next is an English boy of seventeen years old, who



from having lately had the small-pox is feeble and almost blind, a miserable object, but pity for his misfortunes induces me to make his duty as easy as possible. Finally I have a little ugly French boy, the very image of a baboon, who from having served for some time on different privateers has all the tricks of a veteran man-of-war's man, though only thirteen years old, and by having been in an English prison, has learned enough of the language to be a proficient in swearing.

With these human scrapings for a ship's company, the cutter *Caroline* was three months on her solitary way as far as the Cape of Good Hope, where the inhabitants "could not disguise their astonishment at the size of the vessel, the boyish appearance of the master and mate, and the queer and unique characters of the two men and boy who composed the crew." The English officials thought it strange indeed, suspecting some scheme of French spies or smuggled dispatches, but Richard Cleveland's petition to the Governor, Lord McCartney, ingenuously patterned after certain letters addressed to noblemen as found in an old magazine aboard his vessel, won the day for him and he was permitted to sell the cutter and her cargo, having changed his mind about proceeding farther.

Taking passage to Batavia, he looked about for another venture but found nothing to his liking

and wandered on to Canton, where he was attracted by the prospect of a voyage to the northwest coast of America to buy furs from the Indians. In a cutter no larger than the *Caroline* he risked all his cash and credit, stocking her with \$20,000 worth of assorted merchandise for barter, and put out across the Pacific, "having on board twenty-one persons, consisting, except two Americans, of English, Irish, Swedes and French, but principally the first, who were runaways from the men-of-war and Indiamen, and two from a Botany Bay ship who had made their escape, for we were obliged to take such as we could get, served to complete a list of as accomplished villains as ever disgraced any country."

After a month of weary, drenching hardship off the China coast, this crew of cutthroats mutinied. With a loyal handful, including the black cook, Cleveland locked up the provisions, mounted two four-pounders on the quarter-deck, rammed them full of grape-shot, and fetched up the flint-lock muskets and pistols from the cabin. The mutineers were then informed that if they poked their heads above the hatches he would blow them overboard. Losing enthusiasm and weakened by hunger, they asked to be set ashore; so the skipper

marooned the lot. For two days the cutter lay off-shore while a truce was argued, the upshot being that four of the rascals gave in and the others were left behind.

Fifty days more of it and, washed by icy seas, racked and storm-beaten, the vessel made Norfolk Sound. So small was the crew, so imminent the danger that the Indians might take her by boarding, that screens of hides were rigged along the bulwarks to hide the deck from view. Stranded and getting clear, warding off attacks, Captain Richard Cleveland stayed two months on the wilderness coast of Oregon, trading one musket for eight prime sea-otter skins until there was no more room below. Sixty thousand dollars was the value of the venture when he sailed for China by way of the Sandwich Islands, forty thousand of profit, and he was twenty-five years old with the zest for roving undiminished.

He next appeared in Calcutta, buying a twenty-five-ton pilot boat under the Danish flag for a fling at Mauritius and a speculation in prizes brought in by French privateers. Finding none in port, he loaded seven thousand bags of coffee in a ship for Copenhagen and conveyed as a passenger a kindred spirit, young Nathaniel Shaler,

whom he took into partnership. At Hamburg these two bought a fast brig, the *Lelia Byrd*, to try their fortune on the west coast of South America, and recruited a third partner, a boyish Polish nobleman, Count de Rousillon, who had been an aide to Kosciusko. Three seafaring musketeers, true gentlemen rovers, all under thirty, sailing out to beard the viceroys of Spain!

From Valparaiso, where other American ships were detained and robbed, they adroitly escaped and steered north to Mexico and California. At San Diego they fought their way out of the harbor, silencing the Spanish fort with their six guns. Then to Canton with furs, and Richard Cleveland went home at thirty years of age after seven years' absence and voyaging twice around the world, having wrested success from almost every imaginable danger and obstacle, with \$70,000 to make him a rich man in his own town. He was neither more nor less than an American sailor of the kind that made the old merchant marine magnificent.

It was true romance, also, when the first American shipmasters set foot in mysterious Japan, a half century before Perry's squadron shattered the immemorial isolation of the land of the Shoguns and the Samurai. Only the Dutch had been

permitted to hold any foreign intercourse whatever with this hermit nation and for two centuries they had maintained their singular commercial monopoly at a price measured in terms of the deepest degradation of dignity and respect. The few Dutch merchants suffered to reside in Japan were restricted to a small island in Nagasaki harbor, leaving it only once in four years when the Resident, or chief agent, journeyed to Yeddo to offer gifts and most humble obeisance to the Shogun, "creeping forward on his hands and feet, and falling on his knees, bowed his head to the ground, and retired again in absolute silence, crawling exactly like a crab," said one of these pilgrims who added: "We may not keep Sundays or fast days, or allow our spiritual hymns or prayers to be heard; never mention the name of Christ. Besides these things, we have to submit to other insulting imputations which are always painful to a noble heart. The reason which impels the Dutch to bear all these sufferings so patiently is simply the love of gain."

In return for these humiliations the Dutch East India Company was permitted to send one or two ships a year from Batavia to Japan and to export copper, silk, gold, camphor, porcelain, bronze, and rare woods. The American ship *Franklin* arrived



at Batavia in 1799 and Captain James Devereux of Salem learned that a charter was offered for one of these annual voyages. After a deal of Yankee dickering with the hard-headed Dutchmen, a bargain was struck and the *Franklin* sailed for Nagasaki with cloves, chintz, sugar, tin, black pepper, sapan wood, and elephants' teeth. The instructions were elaborate and punctilious, salutes to be fired right and left, nine guns for the Emperor's guard while passing in, thirteen guns at the anchorage; all books on board to be sealed up in a cask, Bibles in particular, and turned over to the Japanese officials, all firearms sent ashore, ship dressed with colors whenever the "Commissaries of the Chief" graciously came aboard, and a carpet on deck for them to sit upon.

Two years later, the *Margaret* of Salem made the same sort of a voyage, and in both instances the supercargoes, one of whom happened to be a younger brother of Captain Richard Cleveland, wrote journals of the extraordinary episode. For these mariners alone was the curtain lifted which concealed the feudal Japan from the eyes of the civilized world. Alert and curious, these Yankee traders explored the narrow streets of Nagasaki, visited temples, were handsomely entertained by



officers and merchants, and exchanged their wares in the market-place. They were as much at home, no doubt, as when buying piculs of pepper from a rajah of Qualah Battoo, or dining with an elderly mandarin of Cochin China. It was not too much to say that "the profuse stores of knowledge brought by every ship's crew, together with unheard of curiosities from every savage shore, gave the community of Salem a rare alertness of intellect."

It was a Salem bark, the *Lydia*, that first displayed the American flag to the natives of Guam in 1801. She was chartered by the Spanish government of Manila to carry to the Marianne Islands, as those dots on the chart of the Pacific were then called, the new Governor, his family, his suite, and his luggage. First Mate William Haswell kept a diary in a most conscientious fashion, and here and there one gleans an item with a humor of its own. "Now having to pass through dangerous straits," he observes, "we went to work to make boarding nettings and to get our arms in the best order, but had we been attacked we should have been taken with ease. Between Panay and Negros all the passengers were in the greatest confusion for fear of being taken and put to death in the dark and not have time to say their prayers."

The decks were in confusion most of the time, what with the Governor, his lady, three children, two servant girls and twelve men servants, a friar and his servant, a judge and two servants, not to mention some small hogs, two sheep, an ox, and a goat to feed the passengers who were too dainty for sea provender. The friar was an interesting character. A great pity that the worthy mate of the *Lydia* should not have been more explicit! It intrigues the reader of his manuscript diary to be told that "the Friar was praying night and day but it would not bring a fair wind. His behavior was so bad that we were forced to send him to Coventry, or in other words, no one would speak to him."

The Spanish governors of Guam had in operation an economic system which compelled the admiration of this thrifty Yankee mate. The natives wore very few clothes, he concluded, because the Governor was the only shopkeeper and he insisted on a profit of at least eight hundred per cent. There was a native militia regiment of a thousand men who were paid ten dollars a year. With this cash they bought Bengal goods, cottons, Chinese pans, pots, knives, and hoes at the Governor's store, so that "all this money never left the

Governor's hands. It was fetched to him by the galleons in passing, and when he was relieved he carried it with him to Manila, often to the amount of eighty or ninety thousand dollars." A glimpse of high finance without a flaw!

There is pathos, simple and moving, in the stories of shipwreck and stranding on hostile or desert coasts. These disasters were far more frequent then than now, because navigation was partly guesswork and ships were very small. Among these tragedies was that of the *Commerce*, bound from Boston to Bombay in 1793. The captain lost his bearings and thought he was off Malabar when the ship piled up on the beach in the night. The nearest port was Muscat and the crew took to the boats in the hope of reaching it. Stormy weather drove them ashore where armed Arabs on camels stripped them of clothes and stores and left them to die among the sand dunes.

On foot they trudged day after day in the direction of Muscat, and how they suffered and what they endured was told by one of the survivors, young Daniel Saunders. Soon they began to drop out and die in their tracks in the manner of "Benjamin Williams, William Leghorn, and Thomas Barnard whose bodies were exposed naked to the

scorching sun and finding their strength and spirits quite exhausted they lay down expecting nothing but death for relief." The next to be left behind was Mr. Robert Williams, merchant and part owner, "and we therefore with reluctance abandoned him to the mercy of God, suffering ourselves all the horrors that fill the mind at the approach of death." Near the beach and a forlorn little oasis, they stumbled across Charles Lapham, who had become separated from them. He had been without water for five days "and after many efforts he got upon his feet and endeavored to walk. Seeing him in so wretched a condition I could not but sympathize enough with him in his torments to go back with him" toward water two miles away, "which both my other companions refused to do. Accordingly they walked forward while I went back a considerable distance with Lapham until, his strength failing him, he suddenly fell on the ground, nor was he able to rise again or even speak to me. Finding it vain to stay with him, I covered him with sprays and leaves which I tore from an adjacent tree, it being the last friendly office I could do him."

Eight living skeletons left of eighteen strong

seamen tottered into Muscat and were cared for by the English consul. Daniel Saunders worked his passage to England, was picked up by a press-gang, escaped, and so returned to Salem. It was the fate of Juba Hill, the black cook from Boston, to be detained among the Arabs as a slave. It is worth noting that a black sea-cook figured in many of these tales of daring and disaster, and among them was the heroic and amazing figure of one Peter Jackson who belonged in the brig *Ceres*. While running down the river from Calcutta she was thrown on her beam ends and Peter, perhaps dumping garbage over the rail, took a header. Among the things tossed to him as he floated away was a sail-boom on which he was swiftly carried out of sight by the turbid current. All on board concluded that Peter Jackson had been eaten by sharks or crocodiles and it was so reported when they arrived home. An administrator was appointed for his goods and chattels and he was officially deceased in the eyes of the law. A year or so later this unconquerable sea-cook appeared in the streets of Salem, grinning a welcome to former shipmates who fled from him in terror as a ghostly visitation. He had floated twelve hours on his sail-boom, it seemed, fighting off the sharks



with his feet, and finally drifting ashore. "He had hard work to do away with the impressions of being dead," runs the old account, "but succeeded and was allowed the rights and privileges of the living."

The community of interests in these voyages of long ago included not only the ship's company but also the townspeople, even the boys and girls, who entrusted their little private speculations or "adventures" to the captain. It was a custom which flourished well into the nineteenth century. These memoranda are sprinkled through the account books of the East Indiamen out of Salem and Boston. It might be Miss Harriet Elkins who requested the master of the *Messenger* "please to purchase at Calcutta two net beads with draperies; if at Batavia or any spice market, nutmegs or mace; or if at Canton, two Canton shawls of the enclosed colors at \$5 per shawl. Enclosed is \$10."

Again, it might be Mr. John R. Tucker who ventured in the same ship one hundred Spanish dollars to be invested in coffee and sugar, or Captain Nathaniel West who risked in the *Astrea* fifteen boxes of spermaceti candles and a pipe of Teneriffe wine. It is interesting to discover what



was done with Mr. Tucker's hundred Spanish dollars, as invested for him by the skipper of the *Messenger* at Batavia and duly accounted for. Ten bags of coffee were bought for \$83.30, the extra expenses of duty, boat-hire, and sacking bringing the total outlay to \$90.19. The coffee was sold at Antwerp on the way home for \$183.75, and Mr. Tucker's handsome profit on the adventure was therefore \$93.56, or more than one hundred per cent.

It was all a grand adventure, in fact, and the word was aptly chosen to fit this ocean trade. The merchant freighted his ship and sent her out to vanish from his ken for months and months of waiting, with the greater part of his savings, perhaps, in goods and specie beneath her hatches. No cable messages kept him in touch with her nor were there frequent letters from the master. Not until her signal was displayed by the fluttering flags of the headland station at the harbor mouth could he know whether he had gained or lost a fortune. The spirit of such merchants was admirably typified in the last venture of Elias Hasket Derby in 1798, when unofficial war existed between the United States and France.

American ships were everywhere seeking refuge from the privateers under the tricolor, which fairly ran amuck in the routes of trade. For this reason it meant a rich reward to land a cargo abroad. The ship *Mount Vernon*, commanded by Captain Elias Hasket Derby, Jr., was laden with sugar and coffee for Mediterranean ports, and was prepared for trouble, with twenty guns mounted and fifty men to handle them. A smart ship and a powerful one, she raced across to Cape Saint Vincent in sixteen days, which was clipper speed. She ran into a French fleet of sixty sail, exchanged broadsides with the nearest, and showed her stern to the others.

We arrived at 12 o'clock [wrote Captain Derby from Gibraltar] popping at Frenchmen all the forenoon. At 10 A.M. off Algeciras Point we were seriously attacked by a large latineer who had on board more than one hundred men. He came so near our broadside as to allow our six-pound grape to do execution handsomely. We then bore away and gave him our stern guns in a cool and deliberate manner, doing apparently great execution. Our bars having cut his sails considerably, he was thrown into confusion, struck both his ensign and his pennant. I was then puzzled to know what to do with so many men; our ship was running large with all her steering sails out, so that we could not immediately bring her to the wind, and we were directly off Algeciras Point from whence I had reason to fear she

might receive assistance, and my port Gibraltar in full view. These were circumstances that induced me to give up the gratification of bringing him in. It was, however, a satisfaction to flog the rascal in full view of the English fleet who were to leeward.

## CHAPTER V

### YANKEE VIKINGS AND NEW TRADE ROUTES

SOON after the Revolution the spirit of commercial exploration began to stir in other ports than Salem. Out from New York sailed the ship *Empress of China* in 1784 for the first direct voyage to Canton, to make the acquaintance of a vast nation absolutely unknown to the people of the United States, nor had one in a million of the industrious and highly civilized Chinese ever so much as heard the name of the little community of barbarians who dwelt on the western shore of the North Atlantic. The oriental dignitaries in their silken robes graciously welcomed the foreign ship with the strange flag and showed a lively interest in the map spread upon the cabin table, offering every facility to promote this new market for their silks and teas. After an absence of fifteen months the *Empress of China* returned to her home port and her pilgrimage aroused so much attention that the report

of the supercargo, Samuel Shaw, was read in Congress.

Surpassing this achievement was that of Captain Stewart Dean, who very shortly afterward had his fling at the China trade in an eighty-ton sloop built at Albany. He was a stout-hearted old privateersman of the Revolution whom nothing could dismay, and in this tiny *Experiment* of his he won merited fame as one of the American pioneers of blue water. Fifteen men and boys sailed with him, drilled and disciplined as if the sloop were a frigate, and when the *Experiment* hauled into the stream, off Battery Park, New York, "martial music and the boatswain's whistle were heard on board with all the pomp and circumstance of war." Typhoons and Malay proas, Chinese pirates and unknown shoals, had no terrors for Stewart Dean. He saw Canton for himself, found a cargo, and drove home again in a four months' passage, which was better than many a clipper could do at a much later day. Smallest and bravest of the first Yankee East Indiamen, this taut sloop, with the boatswain's pipe trilling cheerily and all hands ready with cutlasses and pikes to repel boarders, was by no means the least important vessel that ever passed in by Sandy Hook.

In the beginnings of this picturesque relation with the Far East, Boston lagged behind Salem, but her merchants, too, awoke to the opportunity and so successfully that for generations there were no more conspicuous names and shipping-houses in the China trade than those of Russell, Perkins, and Forbes. The first attempt was very ambitious and rather luckless. The largest merchantman ever built at that time in the United States was launched at Quincy in 1789 to rival the towering ships of the British East India Company. This *Massachusetts* created a sensation. Her departure was a national event. She embodied the dreams of a Captain Randall and of the Samuel Shaw who had gone as supercargo in the *Empress of China*. They formed a partnership and were able to find the necessary capital.

This six-hundred-ton ship loomed huge in the eyes of the crowds which visited her. She was in fact no larger than such four-masted coasting schooners as claw around Hatteras with deck-loads of Georgia pine or fill with coal for down East, and manage it comfortably with seven or eight men for a crew. The *Massachusetts*, however, sailed in all the old-fashioned state and dignity of a master, four mates, a purser, surgeon, carpenter, gunner,



four quartermasters, three midshipmen, a cooper, two cooks, a steward, and fifty seamen. The second officer was Amasa Delano, a man even more remarkable than the ship, who wandered far and wide and wrote a fascinating book about his voyages, a classic of its kind, — the memoirs of an American merchant mariner of a breed long since extinct.

While the *Massachusetts* was fitting out at Boston, one small annoyance ruffled the auspicious undertaking. Three different crews were signed before a full complement could be persuaded to tarry in the forecastle. The trouble was caused by a fortune-teller of Lynn, Moll Pitcher by name, who predicted disaster for the ship. Now every honest sailor knows that certain superstitions are gospel fact, such as the bad luck brought by a cross-eyed Finn, a black cat, or going to sea on Friday, and these eighteenth century shellbacks must not be too severely chided for deserting while they had the chance. As it turned out, the voyage did have a sorry ending and death overtook an astonishingly large number of the ship's people.

Though she had been designed and built by master craftsmen of New England who knew their

trade surpassingly well, it was discovered when the ship arrived at Canton that her timbers were already rotting. They were of white oak which had been put into her green instead of properly seasoned. This blunder wrecked the hopes of her owners. To cap it, the cargo of masts and spars had also been stowed while wet and covered with mud and ice, and the hatches had been battened. As a result the air became so foul with decay that several hundred barrels of beef were spoiled. To repair the ship was beyond the means of Captain Randall and Samuel Shaw, and reluctantly they sold her to the Danish East India Company at a heavy loss. Nothing could have been more unexpected than to find that, for once, the experienced shipbuilders had been guilty of a miscalculation.

The crew scattered, and perhaps the prediction of the fortune-teller of Lynn followed their roving courses, for when Captain Amasa Delano tried to trace them a few years later, he jotted down such obituaries as these on the list of names:

John Harris. A slave in Algiers at last accounts.

Roger Dyer. Died and thrown overboard off Cape Horn.

William Williams. Lost overboard off Japan.

James Crowley. Murdered by the Chinese near Macao.

John Johnson. Died on board an English India-man.

Seth Stowell. Was drowned at Whampoa in 1790.

Jeremiah Chace. Died with the small-pox at Whampoa in 1791.

Humphrey Chadburn. Shot and died at Whampoa in 1791.

Samuel Tripe. Drowned off Java Head in 1790.

James Stackpole. Murdered by the Chinese.

Nicholas Nicholson. Died with the leprosy at Macao.

William Murphy. Killed by Chinese pirates.

Larry Conner. Killed at sea.

There were more of these gruesome items — so many of them that it appears as though no more than a handful of this stalwart crew survived the *Massachusetts* by a dozen years. Incredible as it sounds, Captain Delano's roster accounted for fifty of them as dead while he was still in the prime of life, and most of them had been snuffed out by violence. As for his own career, it was overcast by no such unlucky star, and he passed unscathed through all the hazards and vicissitudes that could be encountered in that rugged and heroic era of endeavor. Set adrift in Canton when the *Massachusetts* was sold, he promptly turned his hand to

repairing a large Danish ship which had been wrecked by storm, and he virtually rebuilt her to the great satisfaction of the owners.

Thence, with money in his pocket, young Delano went to Macao, where he fell in with Commodore John McClure of the English Navy, who was in command of an expedition setting out to explore a part of the South Seas, including the Pelew Islands, New Guinea, New Holland, and the Spice Islands. The Englishman liked this resourceful Yankee seaman and did him the honor to say, recalls Delano, "that he considered I should be a very useful man to him as a seaman, an officer, or a ship-builder; and if it was agreeable to me to go on board the *Panther* with him, I should receive the same pay and emoluments with his lieutenants and astronomers." A signal honor it was at a time when no love was lost between British and American seafarers who had so recently fought each other afloat.

And so Amasa Delano embarked as a lieutenant of the Bombay Marine, to explore tropic harbors and lagoons until then unmapped and to parley with dusky kings. Commodore McClure, diplomatic and humane, had almost no trouble with the untutored islanders, except on the coast of New

Guinea, where the *Panther* was attacked by a swarm of canoes and the surgeon was killed. It was a spirited little affair, four-foot arrows pelting like hail across the deck, a cannon hurling grape-shot from the taffrail, Amasa Delano hit in the chest and pulling out the arrow to jump to his duty again.

Only a few years earlier the mutineers of the *Bounty* had established themselves on Pitcairn Island, and Delano was able to compile the first complete narrative of this extraordinary colony, which governed itself in the light of the primitive Christian virtues. There was profound wisdom in the comment of Amasa Delano: "While the present natural, simple, and affectionate character prevails among these descendants of the mutineers, they will be delightful to our minds, they will be amiable and acceptable in the sight of God, and they will be useful and happy among themselves. Let it be our fervent prayer that neither canting and hypocritical emissaries from schools of artificial theology on the one hand, nor sensual and licentious crews and adventurers on the other, may ever enter the charming village of Pitcairn to give disease to the minds or the bodies of the unsuspecting inhabitants."

Two years of this intensely romantic existence, and Delano started homeward. But there was a chance of profit at Mauritius, and there he bought a tremendous East Indiaman of fourteen hundred tons as a joint venture with a Captain Stewart and put a crew of a hundred and fifty men on board. She had been brought in by a French privateer and Delano was moved to remark, with an indignation which was much in advance of his times: "Privateering is entirely at variance with the first principle of honorable warfare. . . . This system of licensed robbery enables a wicked and mercenary man to insult and injure even neutral friends on the ocean; and when he meets an honest sailor who may have all his earnings on board his ship but who carries an enemy's flag, he plunders him of every cent and leaves him the poor consolation that it is done according to law. . . . When the Malay subjects of Abba Thule cut down the cocoa-nut trees of an enemy, in the spirit of private revenge, he asked them why they acted in opposition to the principles on which they knew he always made and conducted a war. They answered, and let the reason make us humble, 'The English do so.'"

In his grand East Indiaman young Captain



Delano traded on the coast of India but soon came to grief. The enterprise had been too large for him to swing with what cash and credit he could muster, and the ship was sold from under him to pay her debts. Again on the beach, with one solitary gold moidore in his purse, he found a friendly American skipper who offered him a passage to Philadelphia, which he accepted with the pious reflection that, although his mind was wounded and mortified by the financial disaster, his motives had been perfectly pure and honest. He never saw his native land with so little pleasure as on this return to it, he assures us, and the shore on which he would have leaped with delight was covered with gloom and sadness.

Now what makes it so well worth while to sketch in brief outline the careers of one and another of these bygone shipmasters is that they accurately reflected the genius and the temper of their generation. There was, in truth, no such word as failure in their lexicon. It is this quality that appeals to us beyond all else. Thrown on their beam ends, they were presently planning something else, eager to shake dice with destiny and with courage unbroken. It was so with Amasa Delano, who promptly went to work "with what spirits I

could revive within me. After a time they returned to their former elasticity.”

He obtained a position as master builder in a shipyard, saved some money, borrowed more, and with one of his brothers was soon blithely building a vessel of two hundred tons for a voyage into the Pacific and to the northwest coast after seals. They sailed along Patagonia and found much to interest them, dodged in and out of the ports of Chili and Peru, and incidentally recaptured a Spanish ship which was in the hands of the slaves who formed her cargo.

This was all in the day's work and happened at the island of Santa Maria, not far from Juan Fernandez, where Captain Delano's *Perseverance* found the high-pooped *Tryal* in a desperate state. Spanish sailors who had survived the massacre were leaping overboard or scrambling up to the mastheads while the African savages capered on deck and flourished their weapons. Captain Delano liked neither the Spaniard nor the slave-trade, but it was his duty to help fellow seamen in distress; so he cleared for action and ordered two boats away to attend to the matter. The chief mate, Rufus Low, was in charge, and a gallant sailor he showed himself. They had to climb the

high sides of the *Tryal* and carry, in hand-to-hand conflict, the barricades of water-casks and bales of matting which the slaves had built across the deck. There was no hanging back, and even a mite of a midshipman from Boston pranced into it with his dirk. The negroes were well armed and fought ferociously. The mate was seriously wounded, four seamen were stabbed, the Spanish first mate had two musket balls in him, and a passenger was killed in the fray.

Having driven the slaves below and battened them down, the American party returned next morning to put the irons on them. A horrid sight confronted them. Thirsting for vengeance, the Spanish sailors had spread-eagled several of the negroes to ringbolts in the deck and were shaving the living flesh from them with razor-edged boarding lances. Captain Delano thereupon disarmed these brutes and locked them up in their turn, taking possession of the ship until he could restore order. The sequel was that he received the august thanks of the Viceroy of Chili and a gold medal from His Catholic Majesty. As was the custom, the guilty slaves, poor wretches, were condemned to be dragged to the gibbet at the tails of mules, to be hanged, their bodies

burned, and their heads stuck upon poles in the plaza.

It was while in this Chilean port of Talcahuano that Amasa Delano heard the tale of the British whaler which had sailed just before his arrival. He tells it so well that I am tempted to quote it as a generous tribute to a sailor of a rival race. After all, they were sprung from a common stock and blood was thicker than water. Besides, it is the sort of yarn that ought to be dragged to the light of day from its musty burial between the covers of Delano's rare and ancient *Voyages and Travels*.

The whaler *Betsy*, it seems, went in and anchored under the guns of the forts to seek provisions and make repairs. The captain went ashore to interview the officials, leaving word that no Spaniards should be allowed to come aboard because of the bad feeling against the English. Three or four large boats filled with troops presently veered alongside and were ordered to keep clear. This command was resented, and the troops opened fire, followed by the forts. Now for the deed of a man with his two feet under him.

The chief officer of the *Betsy* whose name was Hudson, a man of extraordinary bravery, cut his cable and his ship swung the wrong way, with her head in shore,

passing close to several Spanish ships which, with every vessel in the harbor that could bring a gun to bear, together with three hundred soldiers in boats and on ship's decks and the two batteries, all kept up a constant fire on him. The wind was light, nearly a calm. The shot flew so thick that it was difficult for him to make sail, some part of the rigging being cut away every minute.

He kept his men at the guns, and when the ship swung her broadside so as to bear upon any of the Spanish ships, he kept up a fire at them. In this situation the brave fellow continued to lie for three-quarters of an hour before he got his topsails sheeted home. The action continued in this manner for near an hour and a half. He succeeded in getting the ship to sea, however, in defiance of all the force that could be brought against him. The ship was very much cut to pieces in sails, rigging, and hull; and a considerable number of men were killed and wounded on board.

Hudson kept flying from one part of the deck to the other during the whole time of action, encouraging and threatening the men as occasion required. He kept a musket in his hand most part of the time, firing when he could find the leisure. Some of the men came aft and begged him to give up the ship, telling him they should all be killed -- that the carpenter had all one side of him shot away -- that one man was cut in halves with a double-headed shot as he was going aloft to loose the foretopsail and the body had fallen on deck in two separate parts -- that such a man was killed at his duty on the forecastle, and one more had been killed in the maintop -- that Sam, Jim, Jack, and Tom were wounded -- and that they would do nothing more towards getting the ship out of the harbor.



His reply to them was, "then you shall be sure to die, for if they do not kill you I will, so sure as you persist in any such cowardly resolution," saying at the same time, "*Out she goes, or down she goes.*"

By this resolute and determined conduct he kept the men to their duty and succeeded in accomplishing one of the most daring enterprises perhaps ever attempted.

An immortal phrase, this simple dictum of first mate Hudson of the *Betsy*, "Out she goes, or down she goes," and not unworthy of being mentioned in the same breath with Farragut's "Damn the torpedoes."

Joined by his brother Samuel in the schooner *Pilgrim*, which was used as a tender in the sealing trade, Amasa Delano frequented unfamiliar beaches until he had taken his toll of skins and was ready to bear away for Canton to sell them. There were many Yankee ships after seals in those early days, enduring more peril and privation than the whalers, roving over the South Pacific among the rock-bound islands unknown to the merchant navigator. The men sailed wholly on shares, a seaman receiving one per cent of the catch and the captain ten per cent, and they slaughtered the seal by the million, driving them from the most favored haunts within a few years. For instance, American ships first visited Mas a Fuera in 1797,



and Captain Delano estimated that during the seven years following three million skins were taken to China from this island alone. He found as many as fourteen vessels there at one time, and he himself carried away one hundred thousand skins. It was a gold mine for profit while it lasted.

There were three Delano brothers afloat in two vessels, and of their wanderings Amasa set down this epitome: "Almost the whole of our connections who were left behind had need of our assistance, and to look forward it was no more than a reasonable calculation to make that our absence would not be less than three years . . . together with the extraordinary uncertainty of the issue of the voyage, as we had nothing but our hands to depend upon to obtain a cargo which was only to be done through storms, dangers, and breakers, and taken from barren rocks in distant regions. But after a voyage of four years for one vessel and five for the other, we were all permitted to return safe home to our friends and not quite empty-handed. We had built both of the vessels we were in and navigated them two and three times around the globe." Each one of the brothers had been a master builder and rigger and a navigator of ships in every part of the world.

By far the most important voyage undertaken by American merchantmen during the decade of brilliant achievement following the Revolution was that of Captain Robert Gray in the *Columbia*, which was the first ship to visit and explore the northwest coast and to lead the way for such adventurers as Richard Cleveland and Amasa Delano. On his second voyage in 1792, Captain Gray discovered the great river he christened Columbia and so gave to the United States its valid title to that vast territory which Lewis and Clark were to find after toiling over the mountains thirteen years later.

## CHAPTER VI

### “FREE TRADE AND SAILORS’ RIGHTS!”

WHEN the first Congress under the new Federal Constitution assembled in 1789, a spirit of pride was manifested in the swift recovery and the encouraging growth of the merchant marine, together with a concerted determination to promote and protect it by means of national legislation. The most imperative need was a series of retaliatory measures to meet the burdensome navigation laws of England, to give American ships a fair field and no favors. The Atlantic trade was therefore stimulated by allowing a reduction of ten per cent of the customs duties on goods imported in vessels built and owned by American citizens. The East India trade, which already employed forty New England ships, was fostered in like manner. Teas brought direct under the American flag paid an average duty of twelve cents a pound while teas in foreign bottoms were taxed .

twenty-seven cents. It was sturdy protection, for on a cargo of one hundred thousand pounds of assorted teas from India or China, a British ship would pay \$27,800 into the custom house and a Salem square-rigger only \$10,980.

The result was that the valuable direct trade with the Far East was absolutely secured to the American flag. Not content with this, Congress decreed a system of tonnage duties which permitted the native owner to pay six cents per ton on his vessel while the foreigner laid down fifty cents as an entry fee for every ton his ship measured, or thirty cents if he owned an American-built vessel. In 1794, Congress became even more energetic in defense of its mariners and increased the tariff rates on merchandise in foreign vessels. A nation at last united, jealous of its rights, resentful of indignities long suffered, and intelligently alive to its shipping as the chief bulwark of prosperity, struck back with peaceful weapons and gained a victory of incalculable advantage. Its Congress, no longer feeble and divided, laid the foundations for American greatness upon the high seas which was to endure for more than a half century. Wars, embargoes, and confiscations might interrupt but they could not seriously harm it.

In the three years after 1789 the merchant shipping registered for the foreign trade increased from 123,893 tons to 411,438 tons, presaging a growth without parallel in the history of the commercial world. Foreign ships were almost entirely driven out of American ports, and ninety-one per cent of imports and eighty-six per cent of exports were conveyed in vessels built and manned by Americans. Before Congress intervened, English merchantmen had controlled three-fourths of our commerce overseas. When Thomas Jefferson, as Secretary of State, fought down Southern opposition to a retaliatory shipping policy, he uttered a warning which his countrymen were to find still true and apt in the twentieth century: "If we have no seamen, our ships will be useless, consequently our ship timber, iron, and hemp; our ship-building will be at an end; ship carpenters will go over to other nations; our young men have no call to the sea; our products, carried in foreign bottoms, will be saddled with war-freight and insurance in time of war — and the history of the last hundred years shows that the nation which is our carrier has three years of war for every four years of peace."

The steady growth of an American merchant

marine was interrupted only once in the following decade. In the year 1793 war broke out between England and France. A decree of the National Convention of the French Republic granted neutral vessels the same rights as those which flew the tricolor. This privilege reopened a rushing trade with the West Indies, and hundreds of ships hastened from American ports to Martinique, Guadeloupe, and St. Lucia.

Like a thunderbolt came the tidings that England refused to look upon this trade with the French colonies as neutral and that her cruisers had been told to seize all vessels engaged in it and to search them for English-born seamen. This ruling was enforced with such barbarous severity that it seemed as if the War for Independence had been fought in vain. Without warning, unable to save themselves, great fleets of Yankee merchantmen were literally swept from the waters of the West Indies. At St. Eustatius one hundred and thirty of them were condemned. The judges at Bermuda condemned eleven more. Crews and passengers were flung ashore without food or clothing, were abused, insulted, or perhaps impressed in British privateers. The ships were lost to their owners. There was no appeal and no



redress. At Martinique an English fleet and army captured St. Pierre in February, 1794. Files of marines boarded every American ship in the harbor, tore down the colors, and flung two hundred and fifty seamen into the foul holds of a prison hulk. There they were kept, half-dead with thirst and hunger while their vessels, uncared for, had stranded or sunk at their moorings. Scores of outrages as abominable as this were on record in the office of the Secretary of State. Shipmasters were afraid to sail to the southward and, for lack of these markets for dried cod, the fishing schooners of Marblehead were idle.

For a time a second war with England seemed imminent. An alarmed Congress passed laws to create a navy and to fortify the most important American harbors. President Washington recommended an embargo of thirty days, which Congress promptly voted and then extended for thirty more. It was a popular measure and strictly enforced by the mariners themselves. The mates and captains of the brigs and snows in the Delaware River met and resolved not to go to sea for another ten days, swearing to lie idle sooner than feed the British robbers in the West Indies. It was in the midst of these demonstrations that Washington seized the

one hope of peace and recommended a special mission to England.

The treaty negotiated by John Jay in 1794 was received with an outburst of popular indignation. Jay was damned as a traitor, while the sailors of Portsmouth burned him in effigy. By way of an answer to the terms of the obnoxious treaty, a seafaring mob in Boston raided and burned the British privateer *Speedwell*, which had put into that port as a merchantman with her guns and munitions hidden beneath a cargo of West India produce.

The most that can be said of the commercial provisions of the treaty is that they opened direct trade with the East Indies but at the price of complete freedom of trade for British shipping in American ports. It must be said, too, that although the treaty failed to clear away the gravest cause of hostility — the right of search and impressment — yet it served to postpone the actual clash, and during the years in which it was in force American shipping splendidly prospered, freed of its most irksome handicaps.

The quarrel with France had been brewing at the same time and for similar reasons. Neutral trade with England was under the ban, and the

Yankee shipmaster was in danger of losing his vessel if he sailed to or from a port under the British flag. It was out of the frying-pan into the fire, and French privateers welcomed the excuse to go marauding in the Atlantic and the Caribbean. What it meant to fight off these greedy cutthroats is told in a newspaper account of the engagement of Captain Richard Wheatland, who was homeward bound to Salem in the ship *Perseverance* in 1799. He was in the Old Straits of Bahama when a fast schooner came up astern, showing Spanish colors and carrying a tremendous press of canvas. Unable to run away from her, Captain Wheatland reported to his owners:

We took in steering sails, wore ship, hauled up our courses, piped all hands to quarters and prepared for action. The schooner immediately took in sail, hoisted an English Union flag and passed under our lee at a considerable distance. We wore ship, she did the same, and we passed each other within half a musket. A fellow hailed us in broken English and ordered the boat hoisted out and the captain to come aboard, which he refused. He again ordered our boat out and enforced his orders with a menace that in case of refusal he would sink us, using at the same time the vilest and most infamous language it is possible to conceive of. . . . We hauled the ship to wind and as he passed poured a whole broadside into him with great success. Sailing faster

than we, he ranged considerably ahead, tacked and again passed, giving us a broadside and furious discharge of musketry, which he kept up incessantly until the latter part of the engagement. His musket balls reached us in every direction but his large shot either fell short or went considerably over us while our guns loaded with round shot and square bars of iron were plied so briskly and directed with such good judgment that before he got out of range we had cut his mainsail and foretopsail all to rags and cleared his decks so effectively that when he bore away from us there were scarcely ten men to be seen. He then struck his English flag and hoisted the flag of The Terrible Republic and made off with all the sail he could carry, much disappointed, no doubt, at not being able to give us a fraternal embrace. We feel confidence that we have rid the world of some infamous pests of society.

By this time, the United States was engaged in active hostilities with France, although war had not been declared. The news of the indignities which American commissions had suffered at the hands of the French Directory had stirred the people to war pitch. Strong measures for national defense were taken, which stopped little short of war. The country rallied to the slogan, “Millions for defense but not one cent for tribute,” and the merchants of the seaports hastened to subscribe funds to build frigates to be loaned to the Government. Salem launched the famous *Essex*, ready

for sea six months after the keel was laid, at a cost of \$75,000. Her two foremost merchants, Elias Hasket Derby and William Gray, led the list with ten thousand dollars each. The call sent out by the master builder, Enos Briggs, rings with thrilling effect:

To Sons of Freedom! All true lovers of Liberty of your Country! Step forth and give your assistance in building the frigate to oppose French insolence and piracy. Let every man in possession of a white oak tree be ambitious to be foremost in hurrying down the timber to Salem where the noble structure is to be fabricated to maintain your rights upon the seas and make the name of America respected among the nations of the world. Your largest and longest trees are wanted, and the arms of them for knees and rising timber. Four trees are wanted for the keel which altogether will measure 146 feet in length, and hew sixteen inches square.

This handsome frigate privately built by patriots of the republic illuminates the coastwise spirit and conditions of her time. She was a Salem ship from keel to truck. Captain Jonathan Hadden, the finest privateersman of the Revolution, made the rigging for the mainmast at his ropewalk in Brown Street. Joseph Vincent fitted out the foremast and Thomas Briggs the mizzenmast in their lofts at the foot of the Common. When

the huge hemp cables were ready for the frigate, the workmen carried them to the shipyard on their shoulders, the parade led by fife and drum. Her sails were cut from duck woven in Daniel Rust’s factory in Broad Street and her iron work was forged by Salem shipsmiths. It was not surprising that Captain Richard Derby was chosen to command the *Essex*, but he was abroad in a ship of his own and she sailed under Captain Edward Preble of the Navy.

The war cloud passed and the merchant argosies overflowed the wharves and havens of New England, which had ceased to monopolize the business on blue water. New York had become a seaport with long ranks of high-steeved bowsprits soaring above pleasant Battery Park and a forest of spars extending up the East River. In 1790 more than two thousand ships, brigs, schooners, and smaller craft had entered and cleared, and the merchants met in the coffee-houses to discuss charters, bills-of-lading, and adventures. Sailors commanded thrice the wages of laborers ashore. Shipyards were increasing and the builders could build as large and swift East Indiamen as those of which Boston and Salem boasted.

Philadelphia had her Stephen Girard, whose



wealth was earned in ships, a man most remarkable and eccentric, whose career was one of the great maritime romances. Though his father was a prosperous merchant of Bordeaux engaged in the West India trade, he was shifting for himself as a cabin-boy on his father's ships when only fourteen years old. With no schooling, barely able to read and write, this urchin sailed between Bordeaux and the French West Indies for nine years, until he gained the rank of first mate. At the age of twenty-six he entered the port of Philadelphia in command of a sloop which had narrowly escaped capture by British frigates. There he took up his domicile and laid the foundation of his fortune in small trading ventures to New Orleans and Santo Domingo.

In 1791 he began to build a fleet of beautiful ships for the China and India trade, their names, *Montesquieu*, *Helvétius*, *Voltaire*, and *Rousseau*, revealing his ideas of religion and liberty. So successfully did he combine banking and shipping that in 1813 he was believed to be the wealthiest merchant in the United States. In that year one of his ships from China was captured off the Capes of the Delaware by a British privateer. Her cargo of teas, nankeens, and silks was worth half a

million dollars to him but he succeeded in ransoming it on the spot by counting out one hundred and eighty thousand Spanish milled dollars. No privateersman could resist such strategy as this.

Alone in his old age, without a friend or relative to close his eyes in death, Stephen Girard, once a penniless, ignorant French cabin-boy, bequeathed his millions to philanthropy, and the Girard College for orphan boys, in Philadelphia, is his monument.

The Treaty of Amiens brought a little respite to Europe and a peaceful interlude for American shipmasters, but France and England came to grips again in 1803. For two years thereafter the United States was almost the only important neutral nation not involved in the welter of conflict on land and sea, and trade everywhere sought the protection of the Stars and Stripes. England had swept her own rivals, men-of-war and merchantmen, from the face of the waters. France and Holland ceased to carry cargoes beneath their own ensigns. Spain was afraid to send her galleons to Mexico and Peru. All the Continental ports were begging for American ships to transport their merchandise. It was a maritime harvest unique and unexpected.

Yankee skippers were dominating the sugar trade of Cuba and were rolling across the Atlantic with the coffee, hides, and indigo of Venezuela and Brazil. Their fleets crowded the roadsteads of Manila and Batavia and packed the warehouses of Antwerp, Lisbon, and Hamburg. It was a situation which England could not tolerate without attempting to thwart an immense traffic which she construed as giving aid and comfort to her enemies. Under cover of the so-called Rule of 1756 British admiralty courts began to condemn American vessels carrying products from enemies' colonies to Europe, even when the voyage was broken by first entering an American port. It was on record in September, 1805, that fifty American ships had been condemned in England and as many more in the British West Indies.

This was a trifling disaster, however, compared with the huge calamity which befell when Napoleon entered Berlin as a conqueror and proclaimed his paper blockade of the British Isles. There was no French navy to enforce it, but American vessels dared not sail for England lest they be snapped up by French privateers. The British Government savagely retaliated with further prohibitions, and Napoleon countered in like manner until no sea

was safe for a neutral ship and the United States was powerless to assert its rights. Thomas Jefferson as President used as a weapon the Embargo of 1807, which was, at first, a popular measure, and which he justified in these pregnant sentences: “The whole world is thus laid under interdict by these two nations, and our own vessels, their cargoes, and crews, are to be taken by the one or the other for whatever place they may be destined out of our limits. If, therefore, on leaving our harbors we are certainly to lose them, is it not better as to vessels, cargoes, and seamen, to keep them at home?”

A people proud, independent, and pugnacious, could not long submit to a measure of defense which was, in the final sense, an abject surrender to brute force. New England, which bore the brunt of the embargo, was first to rebel against it. Sailors marched through the streets clamoring for bread or loaded their vessels and fought their way to sea. In New York the streets of the waterside were deserted, ships dismantled, counting-houses unoccupied, and warehouses empty. In one year foreign commerce decreased in value from \$108,000,000 to \$22,000,000.

After fifteen months Congress repealed the law,

substituting a Non-Intercourse Act which suspended trade with Great Britain and France until their offending orders were repealed. All such measures were doomed to be futile. Words and documents, threats and arguments could not intimidate adversaries who paid heed to nothing else than broadsides from line-of-battle ships or the charge of battalions. With other countries trade could now be opened. Hopefully the hundreds of American ships long pent-up in harbor winged it deep-laden for the Baltic, the North Sea, and the Mediterranean. But few of them ever returned. Like a brigand, Napoleon lured them into a trap and closed it, advising the Prussian Government, which was under his heel: "Let the American ships enter your ports. Seize them afterward. You shall deliver the cargoes to me and I will take them in part payment of the Prussian war debt."

Similar orders were executed wherever his mailed fist reached, the pretext being reprisal for the Non-Intercourse Act. More than two hundred American vessels were lost to their owners, a ten-million-dollar robbery for which France paid an indemnity of five millions after twenty years. It was the grand climax of the exploitation which American commerce had been compelled to endure



through two centuries of tumult and bloodshed afloat. There lingers today in many a coastwise town an inherited dislike for France. It is a legacy of that far-off catastrophe which beggared many a household and filled the streets with haggard, broken shipmasters.

It was said of this virile merchant marine that it throve under pillage and challenged confiscation. Statistics confirm this brave paradox. In 1810, while Napoleon was doing his worst, the deep-sea tonnage amounted to 981,019; and it is a singular fact that in proportion to population this was to stand as the high tide of American foreign shipping until thirty-seven years later. It ebbed during the War of 1812 but rose again with peace and a real and lasting freedom of the seas.

This second war with England was fought in behalf of merchant seamen and they played a nobly active part in it. The ruthless impressment of seamen was the most conspicuous provocation, but it was only one of many. Two years before hostilities were openly declared, British frigates were virtually blockading the port of New York, halting and searching ships as they pleased, making prizes of those with French destinations, stealing sailors to fill their crews, waging war in everything



but name, and enjoying the sport of it. A midshipman of one of them merrily related: "Every morning at daybreak we set about arresting the progress of all the vessels we saw, firing off guns to the right and left to make every ship that was running in heave to or wait until we had leisure to send a boat on board to see, in our lingo, what she was made of. I have frequently known a dozen and sometimes a couple of dozen ships lying a league or two off the port, losing their fair wind, their tide, and worse than all, their market for many hours, sometimes the whole day, before our search was completed."

The right of a belligerent to search neutral vessels for contraband of war or evidence of a forbidden destination was not the issue at stake. This was a usage sanctioned by such international law as then existed. It was the alleged right to search for English seamen in neutral vessels that Great Britain exercised, not only on the high seas but even in territorial waters, which the American Government refused to recognize. In vain the Government had endeavored to protect its sailors from impressment by means of certificates of birth and citizenship. These documents were jeered at by the English naval lieutenant and his boarding

gang, who kidnapped from the forecastle such stalwart tars as pleased their fancy. The victim who sought to inform an American consul of his plight was lashed to the rigging and flogged by a boatswain’s mate. The files of the State Department, in 1807, had contained the names of six thousand American sailors who were as much slaves and prisoners aboard British men-of-war as if they had been made captives by the Dey of Algiers. One of these incidents, occurring on the ship *Betsy*, Captain Nathaniel Silsbee, while at Madras in 1795, will serve to show how this brutal business was done.

I received a note early one morning from my chief mate that one of my sailors, Edward Hulen, a fellow townsman whom I had known from boyhood, had been impressed and taken on board of a British frigate then lying in port. . . . I immediately went on board my ship and having there learned all the facts in the case, proceeded to the frigate, where I found Hulen and in his presence was informed by the first lieutenant of the frigate that he had taken Hulen from my ship under a peremptory order from his commander to visit every American ship in port and take from each of them one or more of their seamen. . . . I then called upon Captain Cook, who commanded the frigate, and sought first by all the persuasive means that I was capable of using and ultimately by threats to appeal to the Government of the place to obtain Hulen’s release, but in

vain. . . . It remained for me only to recommend Hulen to that protection of the lieutenant which a good seaman deserves, and to submit to the high-handed insult thus offered to the flag of my country which I had no means either of preventing or resisting.

After several years' detention in the British Navy, Hulen returned to Salem and lived to serve on board privateers in the second war with England.

Several years' detention! This was what it meant to be a pressed man, perhaps with wife and children at home who had no news of him nor any wages to support them. At the time of the Nore Mutiny in 1797, there were ships in the British fleet whose men had not been paid off for eight, ten, twelve, and in one instance fifteen years. These wooden walls of England were floating hells, and a seaman was far better off in jail. He was flogged if he sulked and again if he smiled — flogged until the blood ran for a hundred offenses as trivial as these. His food was unspeakably bad and often years passed before he was allowed to set foot ashore. Decent men refused to volunteer and the ships were filled with the human scum and refuse caught in the nets of the press-gangs of Liverpool, London, and Bristol.

It is largely forgotten or unknown that this

system of recruiting was as intolerable in England as it was in the United States and as fiercely resented. Oppressive and unjust, it was nevertheless endured as the bulwark of England’s defense against her foes. It ground under its heel the very people it protected and made them serfs in order to keep them free. No man of the common people who lived near the coast of England was safe from the ruffianly press-gangs nor any merchant ship that entered her ports. It was the most cruel form of conscription ever devised. Mob violence opposed it again and again, and British East India-men fought the King’s tenders sooner than be stripped of their crews and left helpless. Feeling in America against impressment was never more highly inflamed, even on the brink of the War of 1812, than it had long been in England itself, although the latter country was unable to rise and throw it off. Here are the words, not of an angry American patriot but of a modern English historian writing of his own nation:<sup>1</sup> “To the people the impress was an axe laid at the foot of the tree. There was here no question, as with trade, of the mere loss of hands who could be replaced. Attacking the family in the person of its natural

<sup>1</sup> *The Press Gang Afloat and Ashore*, by J. R. Hutchinson.

supporter and protector, the octopus system of which the gangs were the tentacles, struck at the very foundations of domestic life and brought to thousands of households a poverty as bitter and a grief as poignant as death. . . . The mutiny at the Nore brought the people face to face with the appalling risks attendant on wholesale pressing while the war with America, incurred for the sole purpose of upholding the right to press, taught them the lengths to which their rulers were still prepared to go in order to enslave them."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE BRILLIANT ERA OF 1812

AMERICAN privateering in 1812 was even bolder and more successful than during the Revolution. It was the work of a race of merchant seamen who had found themselves, who were in the forefront of the world's trade and commerce, and who were equipped to challenge the enemy's pretensions to supremacy afloat. Once more there was a mere shadow of a navy to protect them, but they had learned to trust their own resources. They would send to sea fewer of the small craft, slow and poorly armed, and likely to meet disaster. They were capable of manning what was, in fact, a private navy comprised of fast and formidable cruisers. The intervening generation had advanced the art of building and handling ships beyond all rivalry, and England grudgingly acknowledged their ability. The year of 1812 was indeed but a little distance from the resplendent modern



era of the Atlantic packet and the Cape Horn clipper.

Already these Yankee deep-water ships could be recognized afar by their lofty spars and snowy clouds of cotton duck beneath which the slender hull was a thin black line. Far up to the gleaming royals they carried sail in winds so strong that the lumbering English East Indiamen were hove to or snugged down to reefed topsails. It was not recklessness but better seamanship. The deeds of the Yankee privateers of 1812 prove this assertion to the hilt. Their total booty amounted to thirteen hundred prizes taken over all the Seven Seas, with a loss to England of forty million dollars in ships and cargoes. There were, all told, more than five hundred of them in commission, but New England no longer monopolized this dashing trade. Instead of Salem it was Baltimore that furnished the largest fleet — fifty-eight vessels, many of them the fast ships and schooners which were to make the port famous as the home of the Baltimore clipper model. All down the coast, out of Norfolk, Wilmington, Charleston, Savannah, and New Orleans, sallied the privateers to show that theirs was, in truth, a seafaring nation ardently united in a common cause.

Again and more vehemently the people of England raised their voices in protest and lament, for these saucy sea-raiders fairly romped to and fro in the Channel, careless of pursuit, conducting a blockade of their own until London was paying the famine price of fifty-eight dollars a barrel for flour, and it was publicly declared mortifying and distressing that "a horde of American cruisers should be allowed, unresisted and unmolested, to take, burn, or sink our own vessels in our own inlets and almost in sight of our own harbors." It was Captain Thomas Boyle in the *Chasseur* of Baltimore who impudently sent ashore his proclamation of a blockade of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, which he requested should be posted in Lloyd's Coffee House.

A wonderfully fine figure of a fighting seaman was this Captain Boyle, with an Irish sense of humor which led him to haunt the enemy's coast and to make sport of the frigates which tried to catch him. His *Chasseur* was considered one of the ablest privateers of the war and the most beautiful vessel ever seen in Baltimore. A fleet and graceful schooner with a magical turn for speed, she mounted sixteen long twelve-pounders and carried a hundred officers, seamen, and marines, and was

never outsailed in fair winds or foul. "Out of sheer wantonness," said an admirer, "she sometimes affected to chase the enemy's men-of-war of far superior force." Once when surrounded by two frigates and two naval brigs, she slipped through and was gone like a phantom. During his first cruise in the *Chasseur*, Captain Boyle captured eighteen valuable merchantmen. It was such defiant rovers as he that provoked the *Morning Chronicle* of London to splutter "that the whole coast of Ireland from Wexford round by Cape Clear to Carrickfergus, should have been for above a month under the unresisted domination of a few petty fly-by-nights from the blockaded ports of the United States is a grievance equally intolerable and disgraceful."

This was when the schooner *Syren* had captured His Majesty's cutter *Landrail* while crossing the Irish Sea with dispatches; when the *Governor Tompkins* burned fourteen English vessels in the English Channel in quick succession; when the *Harpy* of Baltimore cruised for three months off the Irish and English coasts and in the Bay of Biscay and returned to Boston filled with spoils, including a half million dollars of money; when the *Prince de Neuchâtel* hovered at her leisure in the Irish

Channel and made coasting trade impossible; and when the *Young Wasp* of Philadelphia cruised for six months in those same waters.

Two of the privateers mentioned were first-class fighting ships whose engagements were as notable, in their way, as those of the American frigates which made the war as illustrious by sea as it was ignominious by land. While off Havana in 1815, Captain Boyle met the schooner *St. Lawrence* of the British Navy, a fair match in men and guns. The *Chasseur* could easily have run away but stood up to it and shot the enemy to pieces in fifteen minutes. Brave and courteous were these two commanders, and Lieutenant Gordon of the *St. Lawrence* gave his captor a letter which read, in part: "In the event of Captain Boyle's becoming a prisoner of war to any British cruiser I consider it a tribute justly due to his humane and generous treatment of myself, the surviving officers, and crew of His Majesty's late schooner *St. Lawrence*, to state that his obliging attention and watchful solicitude to preserve our effects and render us comfortable during the short time we were in his possession were such as justly entitle him to the indulgence and respect of every British subject."

The *Prince de Neuchâtel* had the honor of beating

off the attack of a forty-gun British frigate — an exploit second only to that of the *General Armstrong* in the harbor of Fayal. This privateer with a foreign name hailed from New York and was so fortunate as to capture for her owners three million dollars' worth of British merchandise. With Captain J. Ordronaux on the quarter-deck, she was near Nantucket Shoals at noon on October 11, 1814, when a strange sail was discovered. As this vessel promptly gave chase, Captain Ordronaux guessed — and as events proved correctly — that she must be a British frigate. She turned out to be the *Endymion*. The privateer had in tow a prize which she was anxious to get into port, but she was forced to cast off the hawser late in the afternoon and make every effort to escape.

The breeze died with the sun and the vessels were close inshore. Becalmed, the privateer and the frigate anchored a quarter of a mile apart. Captain Ordronaux might have put his crew on the beach in boats and abandoned his ship. This was the reasonable course, for, as he had sent in several prize crews, he was short-handed and could muster no more than thirty-seven men and boys. The *Endymion*, on the other hand, had a complement of three hundred and fifty sailors and marines, and

in size and fighting power she was in the class of the American frigates *President* and *Constitution*. Quite unreasonably, however, the master of the privateer decided to await events.

The unexpected occurred shortly after dusk when several boats loaded to the gunwales with a boarding party crept away from the frigate. Five of them, with one hundred and twenty men, made a concerted attack at different points, alongside and under the bow and stern. Captain Ordronaux had told his crew that he would blow up the ship with all hands before striking his colors, and they believed him implicitly. This was the hero who was described as "a Jew by persuasion, a Frenchman by birth, an American for convenience, and so diminutive in stature as to make him appear ridiculous, in the eyes of others, even for him to enforce authority among a hardy, weather-beaten crew should they do aught against his will." He was big enough, nevertheless, for this night's bloody work, and there was no doubt about his authority. While the British tried to climb over the bulwarks, his thirty-seven men and boys fought like raging devils, with knives, pistols, cutlasses, with their bare fists and their teeth. A few of the enemy gained the deck, but the



privateersmen turned and killed them. Others leaped aboard and were gradually driving the Americans back, when the skipper ran to the hatch above the powder magazine, waving a lighted match and swearing to drop it in if his crew retreated one step further. Either way the issue seemed desperate. But again they took their skipper's word for it and rallied for a bloody struggle which soon swept the decks.

No more than twenty minutes had passed and the battle was won. The enemy was begging for quarter. One boat had been sunk, three had drifted away filled with dead and wounded, and the fifth was captured with thirty-six men in it of whom only eight were unhurt. The American loss was seven killed and twenty-four wounded, or thirty-one of her crew of thirty-seven. Yet they had not given up the ship. The frigate *Endymion* concluded that once was enough, and next morning the *Prince de Neuchâtel* bore away for Boston with a freshening breeze.

Those were merchant seamen also who held the *General Armstrong* against a British squadron through that moonlit night in Fayal Roads, inflicting heavier losses than were suffered in any naval action of the war. It is a story Homeric,

almost incredible in its details and so often repeated that it can be only touched upon in this brief chronicle. The leader was a kindly featured man who wore a tall hat, side-whiskers, and a tail coat. His portrait might easily have served for that of a New England deacon of the old school. No trace of the swashbuckler in this Captain Samuel Reid, who had been a thrifty, respected merchant skipper until offered the command of a privateer.

Touching at the Azores for water and provisions in September, 1814, he was trapped in port by the great seventy-four-gun ship of the line *Plantagenet*, the thirty-eight-gun frigate *Rota*, and the war-brig *Carnation*. Though he was in neutral water, they paid no heed to this but determined to destroy a Yankee schooner which had played havoc with their shipping. Four hundred men in twelve boats, with a howitzer in the bow of each boat, were sent against the *General Armstrong* in one flotilla. But not a man of the four hundred gained her deck. Said an eyewitness: "The Americans fought with great firmness but more like blood-thirsty savages than anything else. They rushed into the boats sword in hand and put every soul to death as far as came within their power. Some

of the boats were left without a single man to row them, others with three or four. The most that any one returned with was about ten. Several boats floated ashore full of dead bodies. . . . For three days after the battle we were employed in burying the dead that washed on shore in the surf."

This tragedy cost the British squadron one hundred and twenty men in killed and one hundred and thirty in wounded, while Captain Reid lost only two dead and had seven wounded. He was compelled to retreat ashore next day when the ships stood in to sink his schooner with their big guns, but the honors of war belonged to him and well-earned were the popular tributes when he saw home again, nor was there a word too much in the florid toast: "Captain Reid — his valor has shed a blaze of renown upon the character of our seamen, and won for himself a laurel of eternal bloom."

It is not to glorify war nor to rekindle an ancient feud that such episodes as these are recalled to mind. These men, and others like them, did their duty as it came to them, and they were sailors of whom the whole Anglo-Saxon race might be proud. In the crisis they were Americans, not privateersmen

in quest of plunder, and they would gladly die sooner than haul down the Stars and Stripes. The England against which they fought was not the England of today. Their honest grievances, inflicted by a Government too intent upon crushing Napoleon to be fair to neutrals, have long ago been obliterated. This War of 1812 cleared the vision of the Mother Country and forever taught her Government that the people of the Republic were, in truth, free and independent.

This lesson was driven home not only by the guns of the *Constitution* and the *United States*, but also by the hundreds of privateers and the forty thousand able seamen who were eager to sail in them. They found no great place in naval history, but England knew their prowess and respected it. Every schoolboy is familiar with the duels of the *Wasp* and the *Frolic*, of the *Enterprise* and the *Boxer*; but how many people know what happened when the privateer *Decatur* met and whipped the *Dominica* of the British Navy to the southward of Bermuda?

Captain Diron was the man who did it as he was cruising out of Charleston, South Carolina, in the summer of 1813. Sighting an armed schooner slightly heavier than his own vessel, he made for

her and was unperturbed when the royal ensign streamed from her gaff. Clearing for action, he closed the hatches so that none of his men could hide below. The two schooners fought in the veiling smoke until the American could ram her bowsprit over the other's stern and pour her whole crew aboard. In the confined space of the deck, almost two hundred men and lads were slashing and stabbing and shooting amid yells and huzzas. Lieutenant Barretté, the English commander, only twenty-five years old, was mortally hurt and every other officer, excepting the surgeon and one midshipman, was killed or wounded. Two-thirds of the crew were down but still they refused to surrender, and Captain Diron had to pull down the colors with his own hands. Better discipline and marksmanship had won the day for him and his losses were comparatively small.

Men of his description were apt to think first of glory and let the profits go hang, for there was no cargo to be looted in a King's ship. Other privateersmen, however, were not so valiant or quarrelsome, and there was many a one tied up in London River or the Mersey which had been captured without very savage resistance. Yet on the whole it is fair to say that the private armed ships



outfought and outsailed the enemy as impressively as did the few frigates of the American Navy.

There was a class of them which exemplified the rapid development of the merchant marine in a conspicuous manner — large commerce destroyers too swift to be caught, too powerful to fear the smaller cruisers. They were extremely profitable business ventures, entrusted to the command of the most audacious and skillful masters that could be engaged. Of this type was the ship *America* of Salem, owned by the Crowninshields, which made twenty-six prizes and brought safely into port property which realized more than a million dollars. Of this the owners and shareholders received six hundred thousand dollars as dividends. She was a stately vessel, built for the East India trade, and was generally conceded to be the fastest privateer afloat. For this service the upper deck was removed and the sides were filled in with stout oak timber as an armored protection, and longer yards and royal masts gave her a huge area of sail. Her crew of one hundred and fifty men had the exacting organization of a man-of-war, including, it is interesting to note, three lieutenants, three mates, a sailing-master, surgeon, purser, captain of marines, gunners, seven prize masters, armorer, drummer,



and a fifer. Discipline was severe, and flogging was the penalty for breaking the regulations.

During her four cruises, the *America* swooped among the plodding merchantmen like a falcon on a dovecote, the sight of her frightening most of her prey into submission, with a brush now and then to exercise the crews of the twenty-two guns, and perhaps a man or two hit. Long after the war, Captain James Chever, again a peaceful merchant mariner, met at Valparaiso, Sir James Thompson, commander of the British frigate *Dublin*, which had been fitted out in 1813 for the special purpose of chasing the *America*. In the course of a cordial chat between the two captains the Briton remarked:

"I was once almost within gun-shot of that infernal Yankee skimming-dish, just as night came on. By daylight she had outsailed the *Dublin* so devilish fast that she was no more than a speck on the horizon. By the way, I wonder if you happen to know the name of the beggar that was master of her."

"I'm the beggar," chuckled Captain Chever, and they drank each other's health on the strength of it.

Although the Treaty of Ghent omitted mention

of the impressment of sailors, which had been the burning issue of the war, there were no more offenses of this kind. American seafarers were safe against kidnapping on their own decks, and they had won this security by virtue of their own double-shotted guns. At the same time England lifted the curse of the press-gang from her own people, who refused longer to endure it.

There seemed no reason why the two nations, having finally fought their differences to a finish, should not share the high seas in peaceful rivalry; but the irritating problems of protection and reciprocity survived to plague and hamper commerce. It was difficult for England to overcome the habit of guarding her trade against foreign invasion. Agreeing with the United States to waive all discriminating duties between the ports of the two countries — this was as much as she was at that time willing to yield. She still insisted upon regulating the trade of her West Indies and Canada. American East Indiamen were to be limited to direct voyages and could not bring cargoes to Europe. Though this discrimination angered Congress, to which it appeared as lopsided reciprocity, the old duties were nevertheless repealed; and then, presto! the British colonial policy

of exclusion was enforced and eighty thousand tons of American shipping became idle because the West India market was closed.

There followed several years of unhappy wrangling, a revival of the old smuggling spirit, the risk of seizure and confiscations, and shipping merchants with long faces talking ruin. The theory of free trade versus protection was as debatable and opinions were as conflicting then as now. Some were for retaliation, others for conciliation; and meanwhile American shipmasters went about their business, with no room for theories in their honest heads, and secured more and more of the world's trade. Curiously enough, the cries of calamity in the United States were echoed across the water, where the *London Times* lugubriously exclaimed: "The shipping interest, the cradle of our navy, is half ruined. Our commercial monopoly exists no longer; and thousands of our manufacturers are starving or seeking redemption in distant lands. We have closed the Western Indies against America from feelings of commercial rivalry. Its active seamen have already engrossed an important branch of our carrying trade to the Eastern Indies. Her starred flag is now conspicuous on every sea and will soon defy our thunder."

It was not until 1849 that Great Britain threw overboard her long catalogue of protective navigation laws which had been piling up since the time of Cromwell, and declared for free trade afloat. Meanwhile the United States had drifted in the same direction, barring foreign flags from its coastwise shipping but offering full exemption from all discriminating duties and tonnage duties to every maritime nation which should respond in like manner. This latter legislation was enacted in 1828 and definitely abandoned the doctrine of protection in so far as it applied to American ships and sailors. For a generation thereafter, during which ocean rivalry was a battle royal of industry, enterprise, and skill, the United States was paramount and her merchant marine attained its greatest successes.

There is one school of modern economists who hold that the seeds of decay and downfall were planted by this adoption of free trade in 1828, while another faction of gentlemen quite as estimable and authoritative will quote facts and figures by the ream to prove that governmental policies had nothing whatever to do with the case. These adversaries have written and are still writing many volumes in which they almo t

invariably lose their tempers. Partisan politics befog the tariff issue afloat as well as ashore, and one's course is not easy to chart. It is indisputable, however, that so long as Yankee ships were better, faster, and more economically managed, they won a commanding share of the world's trade. When they ceased to enjoy these qualities of superiority, they lost the trade and suffered for lack of protection to overcome the handicap.

The War of 1812 was the dividing line between two eras of salt water history. On the farther side lay the turbulent centuries of hazard and bloodshed and piracy, of little ships and indomitable seamen who pursued their voyages in the reek of gunpowder and of legalized pillage by the stronger, and of merchant adventurers who explored new markets wherever there was water enough to float their keels. They belonged to the rude and lusty youth of a world which lived by the sword and which gloried in action. Even into the early years of the nineteenth century these mariners still sailed — Elizabethan in deed and spirit.

On the hither side of 1812 were seas unvexed by the privateer and the freebooter. The lateen-rigged corsairs had been banished from their lairs in the harbors of Algiers, and ships needed to show

no broadsides of cannon in the Atlantic trade. For a time they carried the old armament among the lawless islands of the Orient and off Spanish-American coasts where the vocation of piracy made its last stand, but the great trade routes of the globe were peaceful highways for the white-winged fleets of all nations. The American seamen who had fought for the right to use the open sea were now to display their prowess in another way and in a romance of achievement that was no less large and thrilling.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PACKET SHIPS OF THE "ROARING FORTIES"

IT was on the stormy Atlantic, called by sailormen the Western Ocean, that the packet ships won the first great contest for supremacy and knew no rivals until the coming of the age of steam made them obsolete. Their era antedated that of the clipper and was wholly distinct. The Atlantic packet was the earliest liner: she made regular sailings and carried freight and passengers instead of trading on her owners' account as was the ancient custom. Not for her the tranquillity of tropic seas and the breath of the Pacific trades, but an almost incessant battle with swinging surges and boisterous winds, for she was driven harder in all weathers and seasons than any other ships that sailed. In such battering service as this the lines of the clipper were too extremely fine, her spars too tall and slender. The packet was by no means slow and if the list of her record passages

was superb, it was because they were accomplished by masters who would sooner let a sail blow away than take it in and who raced each other every inch of the way.

They were small ships of three hundred to five hundred tons when the famous Black Ball Line was started in 1816. From the first they were the ablest vessels that could be built, full-bodied and stoutly rigged. They were the only regular means of communication between the United States and Europe and were entrusted with the mails, specie, government dispatches, and the lives of eminent personages. Blow high, blow low, one of the Black Ball packets sailed from New York for Liverpool on the first and sixteenth of every month. Other lines were soon competing — the Red Star and the Swallow Tail out of New York, and fine ships from Boston and Philadelphia. With the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 the commercial greatness of New York was assured, and her Atlantic packets increased in size and numbers, averaging a thousand tons each in the zenith of their glory.

England, frankly confessing herself beaten and unable to compete with such ships as these, changed her attitude from hostility to open admiration. She surrendered the Atlantic packet

trade to American enterprise, and British merchantmen sought their gains in other waters. The Navigation Laws still protected their commerce in the Far East and they were content to jog at a more sedate gait than these weltering packets whose skippers were striving for passages of a fortnight, with the forecastle doors nailed fast and the crew compelled to stay on deck from Sandy Hook to Fastnet Rock.

No blustering, rum-drinking tarpaulin was the captain who sailed the *Independence*, the *Ocean Queen*, or the *Dreadnought* but a man very careful of his manners and his dress, who had been selected from the most highly educated merchant service in the world. He was attentive to the comfort of his passengers and was presumed to have no other duties on deck than to give the proper orders to his first officer and work out his daily reckoning. It was an exacting, nerve-racking ordeal, however, demanding a sleepless vigilance, courage, and cool judgment of the first order. The compensations were large. As a rule, he owned a share of the ship and received a percentage of the freights and passage money. His rank when ashore was more exalted than can be conveyed in mere words. Any normal New York boy would sooner have been

captain of a Black Ball packet than President of the United States, and he knew by heart the roaring chantey:

It is of a flash packet,  
A packet of fame.  
She is bound to New York  
And the *Dreadnought's* her name.  
She is bound to the west'ard  
Where the stormy winds blow.  
Bound away to the west'ard,  
Good Lord, let her go.

There were never more than fifty of these ships afloat, a trifling fraction of the American deep-water tonnage of that day, but the laurels they won were immortal. Not only did the English mariner doff his hat to them, but a Parliamentary committee reported in 1837 that "the American ships frequenting the ports of England are stated by several witnesses to be superior to those of a similar class among the ships of Great Britain, the commanders and officers being generally considered to be more competent as seamen and navigators and more uniformly persons of education than the commanders and officers of British ships of a similar size and class trading from England to America."

It was no longer a rivalry with the flags of other nations but an unceasing series of contests among the packets of the several lines, and their records aroused far more popular excitement than when the great steamers of this century were chipping off the minutes, at an enormous coal consumption, toward a five-day passage. Theirs were tests of real seamanship, and there were few disasters. The packet captain scorned a towboat to haul him into the stream if the wind served fair to set all plain sail as his ship lay at her wharf. Driving her stern foremost, he braced his yards and swung her head to sea, clothing the masts with soaring canvas amid the farewell cheers of the crowds which lined the waterfront.

A typical match race was sailed between the Black Ball liner *Columbus*, Captain De Peyster, and the *Sheridan*, Captain Russell, of the splendid Dramatic fleet, in 1837. The stake was \$10,000 a side, put up by the owners and their friends. The crews were picked men who were promised a bonus of fifty dollars each for winning. The ships sailed side by side in February, facing the wild winter passage, and the *Columbus* reached Liverpool in the remarkable time of sixteen days, two days ahead of the *Sheridan*.

The crack packets were never able to reel off more than twelve or fourteen knots under the most favorable conditions, but they were kept going night and day, and some of them maintained their schedules almost with the regularity of the early steamers. The *Montezuma*, the *Patrick Henry*, and the *Southampton* crossed from New York to Liverpool in fifteen days, and for years the *Independence* held the record of fourteen days and six hours. It remained for the *Dreadnought*, Captain Samuel Samuels, in 1859, to set the mark for packet ships to Liverpool at thirteen days and eight hours.

Meanwhile the era of the matchless clipper had arrived and it was one of these ships which achieved the fastest Atlantic passage ever made by a vessel under sail. The *James Baines* was built for English owners to be used in the Australian trade. She was a full clipper of 2515 tons, twice the size of the ablest packets, and was praised as "the most perfect sailing ship that ever entered the river Mersey." Bound out from Boston to Liverpool, she anchored after twelve days and six hours at sea.

There was no lucky chance in this extraordinary voyage, for this clipper was the work of the



greatest American builder, Donald McKay, who at the same time designed the *Lightning* for the same owners. This clipper, sent across the Atlantic on her maiden trip, left in her foaming wake a twenty-four hour run which no steamer had even approached and which was not equaled by the fastest express steamers until twenty-five years later when the greyhound *Arizona* ran eighteen knots in one hour on her trial trip. This is a rather startling statement when one reflects that the *Arizona* of the Guion line seems to a generation still living a modern steamer and record-holder. It is even more impressive when coupled with the fact that, of the innumerable passenger steamers traversing the seas today, only a few are capable of a speed of more than eighteen knots.

This clipper *Lightning* did her 436 sea miles in one day, or eighteen and a half knots, better than twenty land miles an hour, and this is how the surpassing feat was entered in her log, or official journal: "March 1. Wind south. Strong gales; bore away for the North Channel, carrying away the foretopsail and lost jib; hove the log several times and found the ship going through the water at the rate of 18 to 18½ knots; lee rail under water and rigging slack. Distance run in twenty-four

hours, 436 miles." The passage was remarkably fast, thirteen days and nineteen and a half hours from Boston Light, but the spectacular feature was this day's work. It is a fitting memorial of the Yankee clipper, and, save only a cathedral, the loveliest, noblest fabric ever wrought by man's handiwork.

The clipper, however, was a stranger in the Atlantic and her chosen courses were elsewhere. The records made by the *James Baines* and the *Lightning* were no discredit to the stanch, unconquerable packet ships which, year in and year out, held their own with the steamer lines until just before the Civil War. It was the boast of Captain Samuels that on her first voyage in 1853 the *Dreadnought* reached Sandy Hook as the Cunarder *Canada*, which had left Liverpool a day ahead of her, was passing in by Boston Light. Twice she carried the latest news to Europe, and many seasoned travelers preferred her to the mail steamers.

The masters and officers who handled these ships with such magnificent success were true-blue American seamen, inspired by the finest traditions, successors of the privateersmen of 1812. The fore-castles, however, were filled with English, Irish,

and Scandinavians. American lads shunned these ships and, in fact, the ambitious youngster of the coastwise towns began to cease following the sea almost a century ago. It is sometimes forgotten that the period during which the best American manhood sought a maritime career lay between the Revolution and the War of 1812. Thereafter the story became more and more one of American ships and less of American sailors, excepting on the quarter-deck.

In later years the Yankee crews were to be found in the ports where the old customs survived, the long trading voyage, the community of interest in cabin and forecastle, all friends and neighbors together, with opportunities for profit and advancement. Such an instance was that of the Salem ship *George*, built at Salem in 1814 and owned by the great merchant, Joseph Peabody. For twenty-two years she sailed in the East India trade, making twenty-one round voyages, with an astonishing regularity which would be creditable for a modern cargo tramp. Her sailors were native-born, seldom more than twenty-one years old, and most of them were studying navigation. Forty-five of them became shipmasters, twenty of them chief mates, and six second mates. This reliable

*George* was, in short, a nautical training-school of the best kind and any young seaman with the right stuff in him was sure of advancement.

Seven thousand sailors signed articles in the counting-room of Joseph Peabody and went to sea in his eighty ships which flew the house-flag in Calcutta, Canton, Sumatra, and the ports of Europe until 1844. These were mostly New England boys who followed in the footsteps of their fathers because deep-water voyages were still "adventures" and a career was possible under a system which was both congenial and paternal. Brutal treatment was the rare exception. Flogging still survived in the merchant service and was defended by captains otherwise humane, but a skipper, no matter how short-tempered, would be unlikely to abuse a youth whose parents might live on the same street with him and attend the same church.

The Atlantic packets brought a different order of things, which was to be continued through the clipper era. Yankee sailors showed no love for the cold and storms of the Western Ocean in these foaming packets which were remorselessly driven for speed. The masters therefore took what they could get. All the work of rigging, sail-making,

scraping, painting, and keeping a ship in perfect repair was done in port instead of at sea, as was the habit in the China and California clippers, and the lore and training of the real deep-water sailor became superfluous. The crew of a packet made sail or took it in with the two-fisted mates to show them how.

From these conditions was evolved the "Liverpool packet rat," hairy and wild and drunken, the prey of crimps and dive-keepers ashore, brave and toughened to every hardship afloat, climbing aloft in his red shirt, dungaree breeches, and sea-boots, with a snow-squall whistling, the rigging sheathed with ice, and the old ship burying her bows in the thundering combers. It was the doctrine of his officers that he could not be ruled by anything short of violence, and the man to tame and hammer him was the "bucko" second mate, the test of whose fitness was that he could whip his weight in wild cats. When he became unable to maintain discipline with fists and belaying-pins, he was deposed for a better man.

Your seasoned packet rat sought the ship with a hard name by choice. His chief ambition was to kick in the ribs or pound senseless some invincible bucko mate. There was provocation enough on



both sides. Officers had to take their ships to sea and strain every nerve to make a safe and rapid passage with crews which were drunk and useless when herded aboard, half of them greenhorns, perhaps, who could neither reef nor steer. Brutality was the one argument able to enforce instant obedience among men who respected nothing else. As a class the packet sailors became more and more degraded because their life was intolerable to decent men. It followed therefore that the quarter-deck employed increasing severity, and, as the officer's authority in this respect was unchecked and unlimited, it was easy to mistake the harshest tyranny for wholesome discipline.

Reënforcing the bucko mate was the tradition that the sailor was a dog, a different human species from the landsman, without laws and usages to protect him. This was a tradition which, for centuries, had been fostered in the naval service, and it survived among merchant sailors as an unhappy anachronism even into the twentieth century, when an American Congress was reluctant to bestow upon a seaman the decencies of existence enjoyed by the poorest laborer ashore.

It is in the nature of a paradox that the brilliant success of the packet ships in dominating the



North Atlantic trade should have been a factor in the decline of the nation's maritime prestige and resources. Through a period of forty years the pride and confidence in these ships, their builders, and the men who sailed them, was intense and universal. They were a superlative product of the American genius, which still displayed the energies of a maritime race. On other oceans the situation was no less gratifying. American ships were the best and cheapest in the world. The business held the confidence of investors and commanded an abundance of capital. It was assumed, as late as 1840, that the wooden sailing ship would continue to be the supreme type of deep-water vessel because the United States possessed the greatest stores of timber, the most skillful builders and mechanics, and the ablest merchant navigators. No industry was ever more efficiently organized and conducted. American ships were most in demand and commanded the highest freights. The tonnage in foreign trade increased to a maximum of 904,476 in 1845. There was no doubt in the minds of the shrewdest merchants and owners and builders of the time that Great Britain would soon cease to be the mistress of the seas and must content herself with second place.

It was not considered ominous when, in 1838, the Admiralty had requested proposals for a steam service to America. This demand was prompted by the voyages of the *Sirius* and *Great Western*, wooden-hulled side-wheelers which thrashed along at ten knots' speed and crossed the Atlantic in fourteen to seventeen days. This was a much faster rate than the average time of the Yankee packets, but America was unperturbed and showed no interest in steam. In 1839 the British Government awarded an Atlantic mail contract, with an annual subsidy of \$425,000 to Samuel Cunard and his associates, and thereby created the most famous of the Atlantic steamship companies.

Four of these liners began running in 1840 — an event which foretold the doom of the packet fleets, though the warning was almost unheeded in New York and Boston. Four years later Enoch Train was establishing a new packet line to Liverpool with the largest, finest ships built up to that time, the *Washington Irving*, *Anglo-American*, *Ocean Monarch*, *Anglo-Saxon*, and *Daniel Webster*. Other prominent shipping houses were expanding their service and were launching noble packets until 1853. Meanwhile the Cunard steamers were increasing in size and speed, and the service was no longer an experiment.

American capital now began to awaken from its dreams, and Edward K. Collins, managing owner of the Dramatic line of packets, determined to challenge the Cunarders at their own game. Aided by the Government to the extent of \$385,000 a year as subsidy, he put afloat the four magnificent steamers, *Atlantic*, *Pacific*, *Baltic*, and *Arctic*, which were a day faster than the Cunarders in crossing, and reduced the voyage to nine and ten days. The Collins line, so auspiciously begun in 1850, and promising to give the United States the supremacy in steam which it had won under sail, was singularly unfortunate and short-lived. The *Arctic* and the *Pacific* were lost at sea, and Congress withdrew its financial support after five years. Deprived of this aid, Mr. Collins was unable to keep the enterprise afloat in competition with the subsidized Cunard fleet. In this manner and with little further effort by American interests to compete for the prize, the dominion of the Atlantic passed into British hands.

The packet ships had held on too long. It had been a stirring episode for the passengers to cheer in mid-ocean when the lofty pyramids of canvas swept grandly by some wallowing steamer and left her far astern, but in the fifties this gallant picture

became less frequent, and a sooty banner of smoke on the horizon proclaimed the new era and the obliteration of all the rushing life and beauty of the tall ship under sail. Slow to realize and acknowledge defeat, persisting after the steamers were capturing the cabin passenger and express freight traffic, the American ship-owners could not visualize this profound transformation. Their majestic clippers still surpassed all rivals in the East India and China trade and were racing around the Horn, making new records for speed and winning fresh nautical triumphs for the Stars and Stripes.

This reluctance to change the industrial and commercial habits of generations of American ship-owners was one of several causes for the decadence which was hastened by the Civil War. For once the astute American was caught napping by his British cousin, who was swayed by no sentimental values and showed greater adaptability in adopting the iron steamer with the screw propeller as the inevitable successor of the wooden ship with arching topsails.

The golden age of the American merchant marine was that of the square-rigged ship, intricate, capricious, and feminine in her beauty, with forty nimble seamen in the forecastle, not that of the

metal trough with an engine in the middle and mechanics sweating in her depths. When the Atlantic packet was compelled to abdicate, it was the beginning of the end. After all, her master was the fickle wind, for a slashing outward passage might be followed by weeks of beating home to the westward. Steadily forging ahead to the beat of her paddles or the thrash of her screw, the steamer even of that day was far more dependable than the sailing vessel. The *Lightning* clipper might run a hundred miles farther in twenty-four hours than ever a steamer had done, but she could not maintain this meteoric burst of speed. Upon the heaving surface of the Western Ocean there was enacted over again the fable of the hare and the tortoise.

Most of the famous chanteys were born in the packet service and shouted as working choruses by the tars of this Western Ocean before the chanteyman perched upon a capstan and led the refrain in the clipper trade. You will find their origin unmistakable in such lines as these:

As I was a-walking down Rotherhite Street,  
     'Way, ho, blow the man down;  
 A pretty young creature I chanced for to meet,  
     Give me some time to blow the man down.

Soon we'll be in London City,  
Blow, boys, blow,  
And see the gals all dressed so pretty.  
Blow, my bully boys, blow.

Haunting melodies, folk-song as truly as that of the plantation negro, they vanished from the sea with a breed of men who, for all their faults, possessed the valor of the Viking and the fortitude of the Spartan. Outcasts ashore — which meant to them only the dance halls of Cherry Street and the grog-shops of Ratcliffe Road — they had virtues that were as great as their failings. Across the intervening years, with a pathos indefinable, come the lovely strains of

Shenandoah, I'll ne'er forget you,  
Away, ye rolling river,  
Till the day I die I'll love you ever,  
Ah, ha, we're bound away.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE STATELY CLIPPER AND HER GLORY

THE American clipper ship was the result of an evolution which can be traced back to the swift privateers which were built during the War of 1812. In this type of vessel the shipyards of Chesapeake Bay excelled and their handiwork was known as the "Baltimore clipper," the name suggested by the old English verb which Dryden uses to describe the flight of the falcon that "clips it down the wind." The essential difference between the clipper ship and other kinds of merchant craft was that speed and not capacity became the chief consideration. This was a radical departure for large vessels, which in all maritime history had been designed with an eye to the number of tons they were able to carry. More finely molded lines had hitherto been found only in the much smaller French lugger, the Mediterranean galley, the American schooner.

To borrow the lines of these fleet and graceful models and apply them to the design of a deep-water ship was a bold conception. It was first attempted by Isaac McKim, a Baltimore merchant, who ordered his builders in 1832 to reproduce as closely as possible the superior sailing qualities of the renowned clipper brigs and schooners of their own port. The result was the *Ann McKim*, of nearly five hundred tons, the first Yankee clipper ship, and distinguished as such by her long, easy water-lines, low free-board, and raking stem. She was built and finished without regard to cost, copper-sheathed, the decks gleaming with brass-work and mahogany fittings. But though she was a very fast and handsome ship and the pride of her owner, the *Ann McKim* could stow so little cargo that shipping men regarded her as unprofitable and swore by their full-bodied vessels a few years longer.

That the *Ann McKim*, however, influenced the ideas of the most progressive builders is very probable, for she was later owned by the New York firm of Howland and Aspinwall, who placed an order for the first extremely sharp clipper ship of the era. This vessel, the *Rainbow*, was designed by John W. Griffeths, a marine architect, who was a

pioneer in that he studied shipbuilding as a science instead of working by rule-of-thumb. The *Rainbow*, which created a sensation while on the stocks because of her concave or hollowed lines forward, which defied all tradition and practice, was launched in 1845. She was a more radical innovation than the *Ann McKim* but a successful one, for on her second voyage to China the *Rainbow* went out against the northeast monsoon in ninety-two days and came home in eighty-eight, a record which few ships were able to better. Her commander, Captain John Land, declared her to be the fastest ship in the world and there were none to dispute him.

Even the *Rainbow*, however, was eclipsed when not long afterward Howland and Aspinwall, now converted to the clipper, ordered the *Sea Witch* to be built for Captain Bob Waterman. Among all the splendid skippers of the time he was the most dashing figure. About his briny memory cluster a hundred yarns, some of them true, others legendary. It has been argued that the speed of the clippers was due more to the men who commanded them than to their hulls and rigging, and to support the theory the career of Captain Bob Waterman is quoted. He was first known to fame

in the old *Natchez*, which was not a clipper at all and was even rated as slow while carrying cotton from New Orleans to New York. But Captain Bob took this full-pooped old packet ship around the Horn and employed her in the China tea trade. The voyages which he made in her were all fast, and he crowned them with the amazing run of seventy-eight days from Canton to New York, just one day behind the swiftest clipper passage ever sailed and which he himself performed in the *Sea Witch*. Incredulous mariners simply could not explain this feat of the *Natchez* and suggested that Bob Waterman must have brought the old hooker home by some new route of his own discovery.

Captain Bob had won a reputation for discipline as the mate of a Black Ball liner, a rough school, and he was not a mild man. Ashore his personality was said to have been a most attractive one, but there is no doubt that afloat he worked the very souls out of his sailors. The rumors that he frightfully abused them were not current, however, until he took the *Sea Witch* and showed the world the fastest ship under canvas. Low in the water, with black hull and gilded figurehead, she seemed too small to support her prodigious cloud of sail. For

her there were to be no leisurely voyages with Captain Bob Waterman on the quarter-deck. Home from Canton she sped in seventy-seven days and then in seventy-nine — records which were never surpassed.

With what consummate skill and daring this master mariner drove his ship and how the race of hardy sailors to which he belonged compared with those of other nations may be described in the log of another of them, Captain Philip Dumaresq, homeward bound from China in 1849 in the clipper *Great Britain*. Three weeks out from Java Head she had overtaken and passed seven ships heading the same way, and then she began to rush by them in one gale after another. Her log records her exploits in such entries as these: "Passed a ship under double reefs, we with our royals and studsails set. . . . Passed a ship laying-to under a close-reefed maintopsail. . . . Split all three topsails and had to heave to. . . . Seven vessels in sight and we outsail all of them. . . . Under double-reefed topsails passed several vessels hove-to." Much the same record might be read in the log of the medium clipper *Florence* — and it is the same story of carrying sail superbly on a ship which had been built to stand up under it:

“Passed two barks under reefed courses and close-reefed topsails standing the same way, we with royals and topgallant studding-sails,” or “Passed a ship under topsails, we with our royals set.” For eleven weeks “the topsail halliards were started only once, to take in a single reef for a few hours.” It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that, seventeen days out from Shanghai, the *Florence* exchanged signals with the English ship *John Masterman*, which had sailed thirteen days before her.

Two notable events in the history of the nineteenth century occurred within the same year, 1849, to open new fields of trade to the Yankee clipper. One of these was the repeal of the British Navigation Laws which had given English ships a monopoly of the trade between London and the British East Indies, and the other was the discovery of gold in California. After centuries of pomp and power, the great East India Company had been deprived of its last exclusive rights afloat in 1833. Its ponderous, frigate-built merchantmen ceased to dominate the British commerce with China and India and were sold or broken up. All British ships were now free to engage in this trade, but the spirit and customs of the old régime still



strongly survived. Flying the house-flags of private owners, the East Indiamen and China tea ships were still built and manned like frigates, slow, comfortable, snugging down for the night under reduced sail. There was no competition to arouse them until the last barrier of the Navigation Laws was let down and they had to meet the Yankee clipper with the tea trade as the huge stake.

Then at last it was farewell to the gallant old Indiaman and her ornate, dignified prestige. With a sigh the London *Times* confessed: "We must run a race with our gigantic and unshackled rival. We must set our long-practised skill, our steady industry, and our dogged determination against his youth, ingenuity, and ardor. Let our shipbuilders and employers take warning in time. There will always be an abundant supply of vessels good enough and fast enough for short voyages. But we want fast vessels for the long voyages which otherwise will fall into American hands."

Before English merchants could prepare themselves for these new conditions, the American clipper *Oriental* was loading in 1850 at Hong Kong with tea for the London market. Because of her reputation for speed, she received freightage of six pounds sterling per ton while British ships rode

at anchor with empty holds or were glad to sail at three pounds ten per ton. Captain Theodore Palmer delivered his sixteen hundred tons of tea in the West India Docks, London, after a crack passage of ninety-one days which had never been equaled. His clipper earned \$48,000, or two-thirds of what it had cost to build her. Her arrival in London created a profound impression. The port had seen nothing like her for power and speed; her skysail yards soared far above the other shipping; the cut of her snowy canvas was faultless; all clumsy, needless top-hamper had been done away with; and she appeared to be the last word in design and construction, as lean and fine and spirited as a race-horse in training.

This new competition dismayed British shipping until it could rally and fight with similar weapons. The technical journal, *Naval Science*, acknowledged that the tea trade of the London markets had passed almost out of the hands of the English ship-owner, and that British vessels, well-manned and well-found, were known to lie for weeks in the harbor of Foo-chow, waiting for a cargo and seeing American clippers come in, load, and sail immediately with full cargoes at a higher freight than they could command. Even the Government

viewed the loss of trade with concern and sent admiralty draftsmen to copy the lines of the *Oriental* and *Challenge* while they were in drydock.

British clippers were soon afloat, somewhat different in model from the Yankee ships, but very fast and able, and racing them in the tea trade until the Civil War. With them it was often nip and tuck, as in the contest between the English *Lord of the Isles* and the American clipper bark *Maury* in 1856. The prize was a premium of one pound per ton for the first ship to reach London with tea of the new crop. The *Lord of the Isles* finished loading and sailed four days ahead of the *Maury*, and after thirteen thousand miles of ocean they passed Gravesend within ten minutes of each other. The British skipper, having the smartest tug and getting his ship first into dock, won the honors. In a similar race between the American *Sea Serpent* and the English *Crest of the Wave*, both ships arrived off the Isle of Wight on the same day. It was a notable fact that the *Lord of the Isles* was the first tea clipper built of iron at a date when the use of this stubborn material was not yet thought of by the men who constructed the splendid wooden ships of America.

For the peculiar requirements of the tea trade,

English maritime talent was quick to perfect a clipper type which, smaller than the great Yankee skysail-yarder, was nevertheless most admirable for its beauty and performance. On both sides of the Atlantic partizans hotly championed their respective fleets. In 1852 the American Navigation Club, organized by Boston merchants and owners, challenged the shipbuilders of Great Britain to race from a port in England to a port in China and return, for a stake of \$50,000 a side, ships to be not under eight hundred nor over twelve hundred tons American register. The challenge was aimed at the *Stornaway* and the *Chrysolite*, the two clippers that were known to be the fastest ships under the British flag. Though this sporting defiance caused lively discussion, nothing came of it, and it was with a spirit even keener that Sampson and Tappan of Boston offered to match their *Nightingale* for the same amount against any clipper afloat, British or American.

In spite of the fact that Yankee enterprise had set the pace in the tea trade, within a few years after 1850 England had so successfully mastered the art of building these smaller clippers that the honors were fairly divided. The American owners were diverting their energies to the more lucrative

trade in larger ships sailing around the Horn to San Francisco, a long road which, as a coastwise voyage, was forbidden to foreign vessels under the navigation laws. After the Civil War the fastest tea clippers flew the British flag and into the seventies they survived the competition of steam, racing among themselves for the premiums awarded to the quickest dispatch. No more of these beautiful vessels were launched after 1869, and one by one they vanished into other trades, overtaken by the same fate which had befallen the Atlantic packet and conquered by the cargo steamers which filed through the Suez Canal.

Until 1848 San Francisco had been a drowsy little Mexican trading-post, a huddle of adobe huts and sheds where American ships collected hides — vividly described in *Two Years Before the Mast* — or a whaler called for wood and water. During the year preceding the frenzied migration of the modern Argonauts, only two merchant ships, one bark and one brig, sailed in through the Golden Gate. In the twelve months following, 775 vessels cleared from Atlantic ports for San Francisco, besides the rush from other countries, and nearly fifty thousand passengers scrambled ashore to dig for gold. Crews deserted their ships,



leaving them unable to go to sea again for lack of men, and in consequence a hundred of them were used as storehouses, hotels, and hospitals, or else rotted at their moorings. Sailors by hundreds jumped from the forecastle without waiting to stow the sails or receive their wages. Though offered as much as two hundred dollars a month to sign again, they jeered at the notion. Of this great fleet at San Francisco in 1849, it was a lucky ship that ever left the harbor again.

It seemed as if the whole world were bound to California and almost overnight there was created the wildest, most extravagant demand for transportation known to history. A clipper costing \$70,000 could pay for herself in one voyage, with freights at sixty dollars a ton. This gold stampede might last but a little while. To take instant advantage of it was the thing. The fastest ships, and as many of them as could be built, would skim the cream of it. This explains the brief and illustrious era of the California clipper, one hundred and sixty of which were launched from 1850 to 1854. The shipyards of New York and Boston were crowded with them, and they graced the keel blocks of the historic old ports of New England — Medford, Mystic, Newburyport, Portsmouth,



Portland, Rockland, and Bath — wherever the timber and the shipwrights could be assembled.

Until that time there had been few ships afloat as large as a thousand tons. These were of a new type, rapidly increased to fifteen hundred, two thousand tons, and over. They presented new and difficult problems in spars and rigging able to withstand the strain of immense areas of canvas which climbed two hundred feet to the skysail pole and which, with lower studdingsails set, spread one hundred and sixty feet from boom-end to boom-end. There had to be the strength to battle with the furious tempests of Cape Horn and at the same time the driving power to sweep before the sweet and steadfast trade-winds. Such a queenly clipper was the *Flying Cloud*, the achievement of that master builder, Donald McKay, which sailed from New York to San Francisco in eighty-nine days, with Captain Josiah Creesy in command. This record was never lowered and was equaled only twice — by the *Flying Cloud* herself and by the *Andrew Jackson* nine years later. It was during this memorable voyage that the *Flying Cloud* sailed 1256 miles in four days while steering to the northward under topgallantsails after rounding Cape Horn. This was a rate of speed which, if

sustained, would have carried her from New York to Queenstown in eight days and seventeen hours. This speedy passage was made in 1851, and only two years earlier the record for the same voyage of fifteen thousand miles had been one hundred and twenty days, by the clipper *Memnon*.

Donald McKay now resolved to build a ship larger and faster than the *Flying Cloud*, and his genius neared perfection in the *Sovereign of the Seas*, of 2421 tons' register, which exceeded in size all merchant vessels afloat. This Titan of the clipper fleet was commanded by Donald's brother, Captain Lauchlan McKay, with a crew of one hundred and five men and boys. During her only voyage to San Francisco she was partly dismasted, but Lauchlan McKay rigged her anew at sea in fourteen days and still made port in one hundred and three days, a record for the season of the year.

It was while running home from Honolulu in 1853 that the *Sovereign of the Seas* realized the hopes of her builder. In eleven days she sailed 3562 miles, with four days logged for a total of 1478 knots. Making allowance for the longitudes and difference in time, this was an average daily run of 378 sea miles or 435 land miles. Using the same comparison, the distance from Sandy Hook

to Queenstown would have been covered in seven days and nine hours. Figures are arid reading, perhaps, but these are wet by the spray and swept by the salt winds of romance. During one of these four days the *Sovereign of the Seas* reeled off 424 nautical miles, during which her average speed was seventeen and two-thirds knots and at times reached nineteen and twenty. The only sailing ship which ever exceeded this day's work was the *Lightning*, built later by the same Donald McKay, which ran 436 knots in the Atlantic passage already referred to. The *Sovereign of the Seas* could also boast of a sensational feat upon the Western Ocean, for between New York and Liverpool she outsailed the Cunard liner *Canada* by 325 miles in five days.

It is curiously interesting to notice that the California clipper era is almost generally ignored by the foremost English writers of maritime history. For one thing, it was a trade in which their own ships were not directly concerned, and partizan bias is apt to color the views of the best of us when national prestige is involved. American historians themselves have dispensed with many unpleasant facts when engaged with the War of 1812. With regard to the speed of clipper ships, however,

involving a rivalry far more thrilling and important than all the races ever sailed for the *America's* cup, the evidence is available in concrete form.

Lindsay's *History of Merchant Shipping* is the most elaborate English work of the kind. Heavily ballasted with facts and rather dull reading for the most part, it kindles with enthusiasm when eulogizing the *Thermopylæ* and the *Sir Launcelot*, composite clippers of wood and iron, afloat in 1870, which it declares to be "the fastest sailing ships that ever traversed the ocean." This fairly presents the issue which a true-blooded Yankee has no right to evade. The greatest distance sailed by the *Sir Launcelot* in twenty-four hours between China and London was 354 knots, compared with the 424 miles of the *Sovereign of the Seas* and the 436 miles of the *Lightning*. Her best sustained run was one of seven days for an average of a trifle more than 300 miles a day. Against this is to be recorded the performance of the *Sovereign of the Seas*, 3562 miles in eleven days, at the rate of 324 miles every twenty-four hours, and her wonderful four-day run of 1478 miles, an average of 378 miles.

The *Thermopylæ* achieved her reputation in a passage of sixty-three days from London to Melbourne — a record which was never beaten. Her

fastest day's sailing was 330 miles, or not quite sixteen knots an hour. In six days she traversed 1748 miles, an average of 291 miles a day. In this Australian trade the American clippers made little effort to compete. Those engaged in it were mostly built for English owners and sailed by British skippers, who could not reasonably be expected to get the most out of these loftily sparred Yankee ships, which were much larger than their own vessels of the same type. The *Lightning* showed what she could do from Melbourne to Liverpool by making the passage in sixty-three days, with 3722 miles in ten consecutive days and one day's sprint of 412 miles.

In the China tea trade the *Thermopylæ* drove home from Foo-chow in ninety-one days, which was equaled by the *Sir Launcelot*. The American *Witch of the Wave* had a ninety-day voyage to her credit, and the *Comet* ran from Liverpool to Shanghai in eighty-four days. Luck was a larger factor on this route than in the California or Australian trade because of the fitful uncertainty of the monsoons, and as a test of speed it was rather unsatisfactory. In a very fair-minded and expert summary, Captain Arthur H. Clark,<sup>1</sup> in his youth an

<sup>1</sup> *The Clipper Ship Era*. N. Y., 1910.



officer on Yankee clippers, has discussed this question of rival speed and power under sail — a question which still absorbs those who love the sea. His conclusion is that in ordinary weather at sea, when great power to carry sail was not required, the British tea clippers were extremely fast vessels, chiefly on account of their narrow beam. Under these conditions they were perhaps as fast as the American clippers of the same class, such as the *Sea Witch*, *White Squall*, *Northern Light*, and *Sword-Fish*. But if speed is to be reckoned by the maximum performance of a ship under the most favorable conditions, then the British tea clippers were certainly no match for the larger American ships such as the *Flying Cloud*, *Sovereign of the Seas*, *Hurricane*, *Trade Wind*, *Typhoon*, *Flying Fish*, *Challenge*, and *Red Jacket*. The greater breadth of the American ships in proportion to their length meant power to carry canvas and increased buoyancy which enabled them, with their sharper ends, to be driven in strong gales and heavy seas at much greater speed than the British clippers. The latter were seldom of more than one thousand tons' register and combined in a superlative degree the good qualities of merchant ships.

It was the California trade, brief and crowded



and fevered, which saw the roaring days of the Yankee clipper and which was familiar with racing surpassing in thrill and intensity that of the packet ships of the Western Ocean. In 1851, for instance, the *Raven*, *Sea Witch*, and *Typhoon* sailed for San Francisco within the same week. They crossed the Equator a day apart and stood away to the southward for three thousand miles of the southeast trades and the piping westerly winds which prevailed farther south. At fifty degrees south latitude the *Raven* and the *Sea Witch* were abeam of each other with the *Typhoon* only two days astern.

Now they stripped for the tussle to windward around Cape Horn, sending down studdingsail booms and skysail yards, making all secure with extra lashings, plunging into the incessant head seas of the desolate ocean, fighting it out tack for tack, reefing topsails and shaking them out again, the vigilant commanders going below only to change their clothes, the exhausted seamen stubbornly, heroically handling with frozen, bleeding fingers the icy sheets and canvas. A fortnight of this inferno and the *Sea Witch* and the *Raven* gained the Pacific, still within sight of each other, and the *Typhoon* only one day behind. Then

they swept northward, blown by the booming trade-winds, spreading studdingsails, skysails, and above them, like mere handkerchiefs, the water-sails and ring-tails. Again the three clippers crossed the Equator. Close-hauled on the starboard tack, their bowsprits were pointed for the last stage of the journey to the Golden Gate. The *Typhoon* now overhauled her rivals and was the first to signal her arrival, but the victory was earned by the *Raven*, which had set her departure from Boston Light while the others had sailed from New York. The *Typhoon* and the *Raven* were only a day apart, with the *Sea Witch* five days behind the leader.

Clipper ship crews included men of many nations. In the average fore-castle there would be two or three Americans, a majority of English and Norwegians, and perhaps a few Portuguese and Italians. The hardest seamen, and the most unmanageable, were the Liverpool packet rats who were lured from their accustomed haunts to join the clippers by the magical call of the gold-diggings. There were not enough deep-water sailors to man half the ships that were built in these few years, and the crimps and boarding-house runners decoyed or flung aboard on sailing

day as many men as were demanded, and any drunken, broken landlubber was good enough to be shipped as an able seaman. They were things of rags and tatters — their only luggage a bottle of whiskey.

The mates were thankful if they could muster enough real sailors to work the ship to sea and then began the stern process of whipping the wastrels and incompetents into shape for the perils and emergencies of the long voyage. That these great clippers were brought safely to port is a shining tribute to the masterful skill of their officers. While many of them were humane and just, with all their severity, the stories of savage abuse which are told of some are shocking in the extreme. The defense was that it was either mutiny or club the men under. Better treatment might have persuaded better men to sail. Certain it is that life in the forecandle of a clipper was even more intolerable to the self-respecting American youth than it had previously been aboard the Atlantic packet.

When Captain Bob Waterman arrived at San Francisco in the *Challenge* clipper in 1851, a mob tried very earnestly to find and hang him and his officers because of the harrowing stories told by his sailors. That he had shot several of them from

the yards with his pistol to make the others move faster was one count in the indictment. For his part, Captain Waterman asserted that a more desperate crew of ruffians had never sailed out of New York and that only two of them were Americans. They were mutinous from the start, half of them blacklegs of the vilest type who swore to get the upper hand of him. His mates, boatswain, and carpenter had broken open their chests and boxes and had removed a collection of slung-shots, knuckle-dusters, bowie-knives, and pistols. Off Rio Janeiro they had tried to kill the chief mate, and Captain Waterman had been compelled to jump in and stretch two of them dead with an iron belaying-pin. Off Cape Horn three sailors fell from aloft and were lost. This accounted for the casualties.

The truth of such episodes as these was difficult to fathom. Captain Waterman demanded a legal investigation, but nothing came of his request and he was commended by his owners for his skill and courage in bringing the ship to port without losing a spar or a sail. It was a skipper of this old school who blandly maintained the doctrine that if you wanted the men to love you, you must starve them and knock them down. The fact is proven by

scores of cases that the discipline of the American clipper was both famously efficient and notoriously cruel. It was not until long after American sailors had ceased to exist that adequate legislation was enacted to provide that they should be treated as human beings afloat and ashore. Other days and other customs! It is perhaps unkind to judge these vanished master-mariners too harshly, for we cannot comprehend the crises which continually beset them in their command.

No more extreme clipper ships were built after 1854. The California frenzy had subsided and speed in carrying merchandise was no longer so essential; besides, the passenger traffic was seeking the Isthmian route. What were called medium clippers enjoyed a profitable trade for many years later, and one of them, the *Andrew Jackson*, was never outsailed for the record from New York to San Francisco. This splendid type of ship was to be found on every sea, for the United States was still a commanding factor in the maritime activities of South America, India, China, Europe, and Australia. In 1851 its merchant tonnage rivaled that of England and was everywhere competing with it.

The effects of the financial panic of 1857 and the



aftermath of business depression were particularly disastrous to American ships. Freights were so low as to yield no profit, and the finest clippers went begging for charters. The yards ceased to launch new tonnage. British builders had made such rapid progress in design and construction that the days of Yankee preference in the China trade had passed. The Stars and Stripes floated over ships waiting idle in Manila Bay, at Shanghai, Hong-Kong, and Calcutta. The tide of commerce had slackened abroad as well as at home and the surplus of deep-water tonnage was world-wide.

In earlier generations afloat, the American spirit had displayed amazing recuperative powers. The havoc of the Revolution had been unable to check it, and its vigor and aggressive enterprise had never been more notable than after the blows dealt by the Embargo, the French Spoliations, and the War of 1812. The conditions of trade and the temper of the people were now so changed that this mighty industry, aforetime so robust and resilient, was unable to recover from such shocks as the panic of 1857 and the Civil War. Yet it had previously survived and triumphed over calamities far more severe. The destruction wrought by Confederate cruisers was trifling compared with the



work of the British and French privateers when the nation was very small and weak.

The American spirit had ceased to concern itself with the sea as the vital and dominant element. The footsteps of the young men no longer turned toward the wharf and the waterside and the tiers of tall ships outward bound. They were aspiring to conquer an inland empire of prairie and mountain and desert, impelled by the same pioneering and adventurous ardor which had burned in their seafaring sires. Steam had vanquished sail — an epochal event in a thousand years of maritime history — but the nation did not care enough to accept this situation as a new challenge or to continue the ancient struggle for supremacy upon the sea. England did care, because it was life or death to the little, sea-girt island, but as soon as the United States ceased to be a strip of Atlantic seaboard and the panorama of a continent was unrolled to settlement, it was foreordained that the maritime habit of thought and action should lose its virility in America. All great seafaring races, English, Norwegian, Portuguese, and Dutch, have taken to salt water because there was lack of space, food, or work ashore, and their strong young men craved opportunities. Like the Pilgrim Fathers

and their fishing shallops they had nowhere else to go.

When the *Flying Cloud* and the clippers of her kind — taut, serene, immaculate — were sailing through the lonely spaces of the South Atlantic and the Pacific, they sighted now and then the stumpy, slatternly rig and greasy hull of a New Bedford whaler, perhaps rolling to the weight of a huge carcass alongside. With a poor opinion of the seamanship of these wandering barks, the clipper crews rolled out, among their favorite chanteys:

Oh, poor Reuben Ranzo,  
Ranzo, boys, O Ranzo,  
Oh, Ranzo was no sailor,  
So they shipped him aboard a whaler,  
Ranzo, boys, O Ranzo.

This was crass, intolerant prejudice. The whaling ship was careless of appearances, it is true, and had the air of an ocean vagabond; but there were other duties more important than holystoning decks, scraping spars, and trimming the yards to a hair. On a voyage of two or three years, moreover, there was always plenty of time tomorrow. Brave and resourceful seamen were these New England adventurers and deep-sea hunters who made nautical history after their own fashion. They

flourished coeval with the merchant marine in its prime, and they passed from the sea at about the same time and for similar reasons. Modernity dispensed with their services, and young men found elsewhere more profitable and easier employment.

The great days of Nantucket as a whaling port were passed before the Revolution wiped out her ships and killed or scattered her sailors. It was later discovered that larger ships were more economical, and Nantucket harbor bar was too shoal to admit their passage. For this reason New Bedford became the scene of the foremost activity, and Nantucket thereafter played a minor part, although her barks went cruising on to the end of the chapter and her old whaling families were true to strain. As explorers the whalemens rambled into every nook and corner of the Pacific before merchant vessels had found their way thither. They discovered uncharted islands and cheerfully fought savages or suffered direful shipwreck. The chase led them into Arctic regions where their stout barks were nipped like eggshells among the grinding floes, or else far to the southward where they broiled in tropic calms. The New Bedford lad was as keen to go a-whaling as was his counterpart in Boston or New York to be the

dandy mate of a California clipper, and true was the song:

I asked a maiden by my side,  
Who sighed and looked to me forlorn,  
“Where is your heart?” She quick replied,  
“Round Cape Horn.”

Yankee whaling reached its high tide in 1857 when the New Bedford fleet alone numbered 329 sail and those owned in other ports of Buzzard's Bay swelled the total to 426 vessels, besides thirty more hailing from New London and Sag Harbor. In this year the value of the catch was more than ten million dollars. The old custom of sailing on shares or “lays” instead of wages was never changed. It was win or lose for all hands — now a handsome fortune or again an empty hold and pockets likewise. There was Captain W. T. Walker of New Bedford who, in 1847, bought for a song a ship so old that she was about to be broken up for junk and no insurance broker would look at her. In this rotten relic he shipped a crew and went sailing in the Pacific. Miraculously keeping afloat, this *Envoy* of his was filled to the hatches with oil and bones, twice running, before she returned to her home port; and she earned \$138,450 on a total investment of eight thousand dollars.

The ship *Sarah* of Nantucket, after a three years' cruise, brought back 3497 barrels of sperm oil which sold for \$89,000, and the *William Hamilton* of New Bedford set another high mark by stowing 4181 barrels of a value of \$109,269. The *Pioneer* of New London, Captain Ebenezer Morgan, was away only a year and stocked a cargo of oil and whalebone which sold for \$150,060. Most of the profits of prosperous voyages were taken as the owners' share, and the incomes of the captain and crew were so niggardly as to make one wonder why they persisted in a calling so perilous, arduous, and poorly paid. During the best years of whaling, when the ships were averaging \$16,000 for a voyage, the master received an eighteenth, or about nine hundred dollars a year. The highly skilled hands, such as the boat-steerers and harpooners, had a lay of only one seventy-fifth, or perhaps a little more than two hundred dollars cash as the reward of a voyage which netted the owner at least fifty per cent on his investment. Occasionally they fared better than this and sometimes worse. The answer to the riddle is that they liked the life and had always the gambling spirit which hopes for a lucky turn of the cards.

The countless episodes of fragile boats smashed

to kindling by fighting whales, of the attack renewed with harpoon and lance, of ships actually rammed and sunk, would fill a volume by themselves and have been stirringly narrated in many a one. Zanzibar and Kamchatka, Tasmania and the Seychelles knew the lean, sun-dried Yankee whaler and his motto of a "dead whale or a stove boat." The Civil War did not drive him from the seas. The curious fact is that his products commanded higher prices in 1907 than fifty years before, but the number of his ships rapidly decreased. Whales were becoming scarce, and New England capital preferred other forms of investment. The leisurely old sailing craft was succeeded by the steam whaler, and the explosive bomb slew, instead of the harpoon and lance hurled by the sinewy right arm of a New Bedford man or Cape Verde islander.

Roving whaler and armed East Indiaman, plunging packet ship and stately clipper, they served their appointed days and passed on their several courses to become mere memories, as shadowy and unsubstantial as the gleam of their own topsails when seen at twilight. The souls of their sailors have fled to Fiddler's Green, where all



dead mariners go. They were of the old merchant marine which contributed something fine and imperishable to the story of the United States. Down the wind, vibrant and deep-throated, comes their own refrain for a requiem:

We're outward bound this very day,  
Good-bye, fare you well,  
Good-bye, fare you well.  
We're outward bound this very day,  
Hurrah, my boys, we're outward bound.

## CHAPTER X

### BOUND COASTWISE

ONE thinks of the old merchant marine in terms of the clipper ship and distant ports. The coasting trade has been overlooked in song and story; yet, since the year 1859, its fleets have always been larger and more important than the American deep-water commerce nor have decay and misfortune overtaken them. It is a traffic which flourished from the beginning, ingeniously adapting itself to new conditions, unchecked by war, and surviving with splendid vigor, under steam and sail, in this modern era.

The seafaring pioneers won their way from port to port of the tempestuous Atlantic coast in tiny ketches, sloops, and shallops when the voyage of five hundred miles from New England to Virginia was a prolonged and hazardous adventure. Fog and shoals and lee shores beset these coastwise sailors, and shipwrecks were pitifully frequent.

In no Hall of Fame will you find the name of Captain Andrew Robinson of Gloucester, but he was nevertheless an illustrious benefactor and deserves a place among the most useful Americans. His invention was the Yankee schooner of fore-and-aft rig, and he gave to this type of vessel its name.<sup>1</sup> Seaworthy, fast, and easily handled, adapted for use in the early eighteenth century when inland transportation was almost impossible, the schooner carried on trade between the colonies and was an important factor in the growth of the fisheries.

Before the Revolution the first New England schooners were beating up to the Grand Bank of Newfoundland after cod and halibut. They were of no more than fifty tons' burden, too small for their task but manned by fishermen of surpassing hardihood. Marblehead was then the foremost fishing port with two hundred brigs and schooners on the offshore banks. But to Gloucester belongs the glory of sending the first schooner to the Grand Bank.<sup>2</sup> From these two rock-bound harbors went thousands of trained seamen to man the privateers

<sup>1</sup> It is said that as the odd two-master slid gracefully into the water, a spectator exclaimed: "See how she scoons!" "Aye," answered Captain Robinson, "a *schooner* let her be!" This launching took place in 1713 or 1714.

<sup>2</sup> Marvin's *American Merchant Marine*, p. 287.

and the ships of the Continental navy, slinging their hammocks on the gun-decks beside the whalemen of Nantucket. These fishermen and coastwise sailors fought on the land as well and followed the drums of Washington's armies until the final scene at Yorktown. Gloucester and Marblehead were filled with widows and orphans, and half their men-folk were dead or missing.

The fishing-trade soon prospered again, and the men of the old ports tenaciously clung to the sea even when the great migration flowed westward to people the wilderness and found a new American empire. They were fishermen from father to son, bound together in an intimate community of interests, a race of pure native or English stock, deserving this tribute which was paid to them in Congress: "Every person on board our fishing vessels has an interest in common with his associates; their reward depends upon their industry and enterprise. Much caution is observed in the selection of the crews of our fishing vessels; it often happens that every individual is connected by blood and the strongest ties of friendship; our fishermen are remarkable for their sobriety and good conduct, and they rank with the most skillful navigators."

Fishing and the coastwise merchant trade were closely linked. Schooners loaded dried cod as well as lumber for southern ports and carried back naval stores and other southern products. Well-to-do fishermen owned trading vessels and sent out their ventures, the sailors shifting from one forecastle to the other. With a taste for an easier life than the stormy, freezing Banks, the young Gloucesterman would sign on for a voyage to Pernambuco or Havana and so be fired with ambition to become a mate or master and take to deep water after a while. In this way was maintained a school of seamanship which furnished the most intelligent and efficient officers of the merchant marine. For generations they were mostly recruited from the old fishing and shipping ports of New England until the term "Yankee shipmaster" had a meaning peculiarly its own.

Seafaring has undergone so many revolutionary changes and old days and ways are so nearly obliterated that it is singular to find the sailing vessel still employed in great numbers, even though the gasoline motor is being installed to kick her along in spells of calm weather. The Gloucester fishing schooner, perfect of her type, stanch, fleet, and powerful, still drives homeward from the Banks

under a tall press of canvas, and her crew still divide the earnings, share and share, as did their forefathers a hundred and fifty years ago. But the old New England strain of blood no longer predominates, and Portuguese, Scandinavians, and Nova Scotia "Blue-noses" bunk with the lads of Gloucester stock. Yet they are alike for courage, hardihood, and mastery of the sea, and the traditions of the calling are undimmed.

There was a time before the Civil War when Congress jealously protected the fisheries by means of a bounty system and legislation aimed against our Canadian neighbors. The fishing fleets were regarded as a source of national wealth and the nursery of prime seamen for the navy and merchant marine. In 1858 the bounty system was abandoned, however, and the fishermen were left to shift for themselves, earning small profits at peril of their lives and preferring to follow the sea because they knew no other profession. In spite of this loss of assistance from the Government, the tonnage engaged in deep-sea fisheries was never so great as in the second year of the Civil War. Four years later the industry had shrunk one-half; and it has never recovered its early importance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In 1862, the tonnage amounted to 193,459; in 1866, to 89,386.



The coastwise merchant trade, on the other hand, has been jealously guarded against competition and otherwise fostered ever since 1789, when the first discriminatory tonnage tax was enforced. The Embargo Act of 1808 prohibited domestic commerce to foreign flags, and this edict was renewed in the American Navigation Act of 1817. It remained a firmly established doctrine of maritime policy until the Great War compelled its suspension as an emergency measure. The theories of protection and free trade have been bitterly debated for generations, but in this instance the practice was eminently successful and the results were vastly impressive. Deep-water shipping dwindled and died, but the increase in coastwise sailing was consistent. It rose to five million tons early in this century and makes the United States still one of the foremost maritime powers in respect to salt-water activity.

To speak of this deep-water shipping as trade coastwise is misleading, in a way. The words convey an impression of dodging from port to port for short distances, whereas many of the voyages are longer than those of the foreign routes in European waters. It is farther by sea from Boston to Philadelphia than from Plymouth, England, to Bordeaux.

A schooner making the run from Portland to Savannah lays more knots over her stern than a tramp bound out from England to Lisbon. It is a shorter voyage from Cardiff to Algiers than an American skipper pricks off on his chart when he takes his steamer from New York to New Orleans or Galveston. This coastwise trade may lack the romance of the old school of the square-rigged ship in the Roaring Forties, but it has always been the more perilous and exacting. Its seamen suffer hardships unknown elsewhere, for they have to endure winters of intense cold and heavy gales and they are always in risk of stranding or being driven ashore.

The story of these hardy men is interwoven, for the most part, with the development of the schooner in size and power. This graceful craft, so peculiar to its own coast and people, was built for utility and possessed a simple beauty of its own when under full sail. The schooners were at first very small because it was believed that large fore-and-aft sails could not be handled with safety. They were difficult to reef or lower in a blow until it was discovered that three masts instead of two made the task much easier. For many years the three-masted schooner was the most popular kind

of American merchant vessel. They clustered in every Atlantic port and were built in the yards of New England, New York, New Jersey, and Virginia, — built by the mile, as the saying was, and sawed off in lengths to suit the owners' pleasure. They carried the coal, ice, lumber of the whole seaboard and were so economical of man-power that they earned dividends where steamers or square-rigged ships would not have paid for themselves.

As soon as a small steam-engine was employed to hoist the sails, it became possible to launch much larger schooners and to operate them at a marvelously low cost. Rapidly the four-master gained favor, and then came the five- and six-masted vessels, gigantic ships of their kind. Instead of the hundred-ton schooner of a century ago, Hampton Roads and Boston Harbor saw these great cargo carriers which could stow under hatches four and five thousand tons of coal, and whose masts soared a hundred and fifty feet above the deck. Square-rigged ships of the same capacity would have required crews of a hundred men, but these schooners were comfortably handled by a company of fifteen all told, only ten of whom were in the forecabin. There was no need of sweating and hauling at braces and halliards. The

steam-winch undertook all this toil. The tremendous sails, stretching a hundred feet from boom to gaff could not have been managed otherwise. Even for trimming sheets or setting topsails, it was necessary merely to take a turn or two around the drum of the winch engine and turn the steam valve. The big schooner was the last word in cheap, efficient transportation by water. In her own sphere of activity she was as notable an achievement as the Western Ocean packet or the Cape Horn clipper.

The masters who sailed these extraordinary vessels also changed and had to learn a new kind of seamanship. They must be very competent men, for the tests of their skill and readiness were really greater than those demanded of the deep-water skipper. They drove these great schooners alongshore winter and summer, across Nantucket Shoals and around Cape Cod, and their salvation depended on shortening sail ahead of the gale. Let the wind once blow and the sea get up, and it was almost impossible to strip the canvas off an unwieldy six-master. The captain's chief fear was of being blown offshore, of having his vessel run away with him! Unlike the deep-water man, he preferred running in toward the beach and letting

go his anchors. There he would ride out the storm and hoist sail when the weather moderated.

These were American shipmasters of the old breed, raised in schooners as a rule, and adapting themselves to modern conditions. They sailed for nominal wages and primage, or five per cent of the gross freight paid the vessel. Before the Great War in Europe, freights were low and the schooner skippers earned scanty incomes. Then came a world shortage of tonnage and immediately coastwise freights soared skyward. The big schooners of the Palmer fleet began to reap fabulous dividends and their masters shared in the unexpected opulence. Besides their primage they owned shares in their vessels, a thirty-second or so, and presently their settlement at the end of a voyage coastwise amounted to an income of a thousand dollars a month. They earned this money, and the managing owners cheerfully paid them, for there had been lean years and uncomplaining service and the sailor had proved himself worthy of his hire. So tempting was the foreign war trade, that a fleet of them was sent across the Atlantic until the American Government barred them from the war zone as too easy a prey for submarine attack. They therefore returned to the old coastwise route

or loaded for South American ports — singularly interesting ships because they were the last bold venture of the old American maritime spirit, a challenge to the Age of Steam.

No more of these huge, towering schooners have been built in the last dozen years. Steam colliers and barges have won the fight because time is now more valuable than cheapness of transportation. The schooner might bowl down to Norfolk from Boston or Portland in four days and be threshing about for two weeks in head winds on the return voyage.

The small schooner appeared to be doomed somewhat earlier. She had ceased to be profitable in competition with the larger, more modern fore-and-after, but these battered, veteran craft died hard. They harked back to a simpler age, to the era of the stage-coach and the spinning-wheel, to the little shipyards that were to be found on every bay and inlet of New England. They were still owned and sailed by men who ashore were friends and neighbors. Even now you may find during your summer wanderings some stumpy, weather-worn two-master running in for shelter overnight, which has plied up and down the coast for fifty or sixty years, now leaking like a basket and too frail



for winter voyages. It was in a craft very much like this that your rude ancestors went privateering against the British. Indeed, the little schooner *Polly*, which fought briskly in the War of 1812, is still afloat and loading cargoes in New England ports.

These little coasters, surviving long after the stately merchant marine had vanished from blue water, have enjoyed a slant of favoring fortune in recent years. They, too, have been in demand, and once again there is money to spare for paint and cordage and calking. They have been granted a new lease of life and may be found moored at the wharfs, beached on the marine railways, or anchored in the stream, eagerly awaiting their turn to refit. It is a matter of vital concern that the freight on spruce boards from Bangor to New York has increased to five dollars a thousand feet. Many of these craft belong to grandfatherly skippers who dared not venture past Cape Cod in December, lest the venerable *Matilda Emerson* or the valedudinarian *Joshua R. Coggsell* should open up and founder in a blow. During the winter storms these skippers used to hug the kitchen stove in bleak farmhouses until spring came and they could put to sea again. The rigor of circumstances, however,

forced others to seek for trade the whole year through. In a recent winter fifty-seven schooners were lost on the New England coast, most of which were unfit for anything but summer breezes. As by a miracle, others have been able to renew their youth, to replace spongy planking and rotten stems, and to deck themselves out in white canvas and fresh paint!

The captains of these craft foregather in the ship-chandler's shops, where the floor is strewn with sawdust, the armchairs are capacious, and the environment harmonizes with the tales that are told. It is an informal club of coastwise skippers and the old energy begins to show itself once more. They move with a brisker gait than when times were so hard and they went begging for charters at any terms. A sinewy patriarch stumps to a window, flourishes his arm at an ancient two-master, and booms out:

"That vessel of mine is as sound as a nut, I tell ye. She ain't as big as some, but I'd like nothin' better than to fill her full of suthin' for the west coast of Africy, same as the *Horace M. Bickford* that cleared t'other day, stocked for *sixty thousand dollars*."

"Huh, you'd get lost out o' sight of land, John,"

is the cruel retort, "and that old shoe-box of yours 'ud be scared to death without a harbor to run into every time the sun clouded over. Expect to navigate to Africy with an alarm-clock and a soundin'-lead, I presume."

"Mebbe I'd better let well enough alone," replies the old man. "Africy don't seem as neighborly as Phippsburg and Machiasport. I'll chance it as far as Philadelphy next voyage and I guess the old woman can buy a new dress."

The activity and the reawakening of the old shipyards, their slips all filled with the frames of wooden vessels for the foreign trade, is like a revival of the old merchant marine, a reincarnation of ghostly memories. In mellowed dignity the square white houses beneath the New England elms recall to mind the mariners who dwelt therein. It seems as if their shipyards also belonged to the past; but the summer visitor finds a fresh attraction in watching the new schooners rise from the stocks, and the gay pageant of launching them, every mast ablaze with bunting, draws crowds to the water-front. And as a business venture, with somewhat of the tang of old-fashioned romance, the casual stranger is now and then tempted to purchase a sixty-fourth "piece" of a splendid

Yankee four-master and keep in touch with its roving fortunes. The shipping reports of the daily newspaper prove more fascinating than the ticker tape, and the tidings of a successful voyage thrill one with a sense of personal gratification. For the sea has not lost its magic and its mystery, and those who go down to it in ships must still battle against elemental odds — still carry on the noble and enduring traditions of the Old Merchant Marine.



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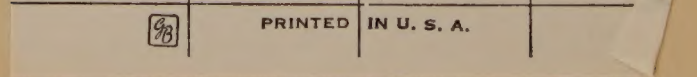
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